

Swami Abhedananda

THE GREAT SAVIOURS OF THE WORLD

by

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA



RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA MATH
CALCUTTA INDIA

First edition, 1947
Second enlarged edition,
December, 1957
Third edition, 1966
Fourth edition, 1977

ROPEES

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Published by Swami Pranabeshananda, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math,
19B, Raja Rajkrishna Street, Calcutta-6 and Printed by M. C. SII at
PRINT O PRINT, 6, Sibn Biswas Lane, Calcutta-6.

DEDICATED
TO THE
LOTUS FEET
OF THE
'GREAT SAVIOURS OF ALL NATIONS'

"O Lord! As rivers rising from different mountains run crooked or straight toward one ocean, so all special religions, rising from various standpoints, run crooked or straight toward Thee—the Infinite Ocean of Existence, Intelligence, Bliss and Love."

NOTES

1. *Vide page 32.*

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA STATES :

"Furthermore, the most ancient sculpture of India in the Cave of Elephanta, near Bombay, representing the ferocious figures of King Kansa....."

Following the interpretation of the figure, as depicted in the Cave of Elephanta, which was current at that time, Swamiji has identified the Andhakasura-vadha-murti-Siva with king Kansa, surrounded by slaughtered infant boys. But the reading of the stone figure as given subsequently by the expert. Dr. Hirānanda Sāstri reads thus :

"The next panel represents Siva as the killer of the demon Andhaka and is one of the finest specimens of sculpture of the period to which the cave belongs. The principal figure here measures about $11\frac{1}{2}$ feet in the height and has a high and profusely carved head-dress showing a skull, a cobra and a crescent over the forehead. The expression of the face is fierce and passionate ; the jaws are set and the tusks project downwards from the corners of the mouth. The eyes are large and apparently swollen with rage. Over the left shoulder and across the thighs hangs a *mundāmāla* or garland of skulls. Siva is here represented with eight arms, though five of them are now mutilated as are both the legs. * * The second right hand weilds a long sword ready to strike ; third holds some indistinct object, while the fourth is broken a little above the elbow. The second left hand holds a bowl under the victim Andhaka who is seen pierced through by the trishula or trident, the terrible weapon of Siva, while the third holds a bell to intimate the moment when the fatal blow is to be struck at the victim. The fourth left arm is now broken ; with the corresponding right arm, it must have held the *gajacharma* or elephant's hide, the raiment of Siva, who in consequence of his wearing it is called *Kṛttivāsa* (= covered with skin), * *

Siva wraps the hide round his loins. But here, he is represented in a state of frenzied excitement and is flourishing it in the air" (—*Vide A Guide to Elephanta*, Delhi, 1934, pp. 27-29). Dr. Hirānanda Sāstri also quoted the allusion to the Asura Andhaka and his slaughter from the original *Purānas* regarding this sculpture. Siva was known as *Andhaka-ripu* as he killed the Asura Andhaka (—*Vide* pp. 29-30).

2. *Vide page 27*

Regarding the invasion of India by Alexander the Great Swamiji accepted the then finding of the date as "between 333 and 327 B.C." The modern historians fix the date as "327-326 B.C."

3. *Vide page 34*

Regarding Pānini's date, Swāmiji writes : "The Sanskrit Grammarian Pānini, who lived in the eleventh century B.C. **" The modern historians fix the date of pānini at 500 B.C., and that of Patanjali 300-200 B.C.

4. *Vide pages 148-149*

Regarding the date of Gautama Buddha, Swāmiji mentions the then tradition date as " * * in the year 624 B.C., on the day of the full moon in the month of Vaishākha, * * she gave birth to a perfect child, as bright as the rising sun". Again, while discussing on *Sri Rāmakrishna and his Teachings*, he says : About 2600 years- ago Gautama Buddha lived and taught the highest ideal of humanity" (*Vide* p. 307). Now, regarding the exact date of the birth of Buddha there are different opinions. Dr. T. W. Rys. Davids confessed in *The Cambridge History of India* (Vol. 11) : * * we are still uncertain as to the exact date of the Buddha's birth. The date 483 B.C., which is adopted in this history must still be regarded as provisional." The modern historians have now adopted the traditional date of Buddha's birth as 623 B.C., and probable date as 566 B.C. Regarding the *Parinirvāna* of Gautama Buddha there are controversies. But according to tradition (Sinhalese) 544 B.C., and (Cantonese) 488 B.C., are accepted,

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

"The Great Saviours of the World" was first published with only four of the series of lectures delivered before the 'Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences' as also before the 'Vedanta Society' of New York. The present enlarged new edition contains all the lectures, delivered before the said two Institutions.

The principal aim and object of these illuminative lectures are to show that the fundamental teachings of the Founders of the great religions of the world have had the same spiritual keynote and that the stories connected with their divine lives and miraculous deeds are analogous.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated in this volume that the universal religion of Vedanta embraces the teachings of all the Saviours of the World, and it harmonizes all sectarian religions.

The word 'saviour' has been used here in its broad and universal sense, which should not be confounded with the orthodox Christian conception of a Saviour who saves sinners from eternal perdition.

The short sketches of the lives of the Saviours included in this volume are based upon authentic historical accounts gathered by different scholars from various sources.

For the convenience of the readers detailed contents and index have been added. we are also indebted to him and Acharya Nandalal Bose for lending us some of the pictures of some Savionrs.

Ramakrishna Vedanta Math
19B, Raja Rajkrishna Street,
Calcutta-6
6th Oct-1977

CONTENTS

Subject	Page
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION	1—19
<p>One God is worshipped in different names—All prophets saved the world—The tribes of Israel before the advent of their prophet—Moses and the Jewish people—Moses was but a messenger—All the prophets were the messengers—God is the just and impartial Lord of all nations—What is true religion—What Vedanta says about the cycles of evolution—Divinity dwells on the topmost crest of the spiritual wave of humanity—What the great souls do for struggling humanity—The law of cyclic evolution and the prophets—What the Jewish people needed about 1400 years before Christ—The prophet zoroaster—Lao-Tze and Confucius—Buddha, the great saviour—The prophet of Islam—Sankaracharya and his religion of Vedanta—Ramanuja and Chaitanya—Ramakrishna and his mission—Each of them has fulfilled his divine mission—The age of reason removes all kinds of sectarianism—He who has seen God has realized Divinity—The latest manifestation of Divinity was in the form of Sri Ramakrishna—He who has faith has everything.</p>	
CHAPTER II	
KRISHNA AND HIS TEACHINGS	20—52
<p>Krishna, the God-incarnate—The historical Krishna—The account of Megasthenes—Prof. Lassen and Krishna—The opinion of cap'tain Wilford—Both Arrian and Strabo about Krishna—Sir William Jones and Sir Godfrey Higgins about Krishna—The ferocious figure of king Kansa in the cave of Elephanta—The Popular belief among the orthodox Hindus about Krishna—Rigveda and Krishna—Krishna in the Ohhandogya Upanishad—Panini and Patanjali about Krishna—The allusions to Krishna offered by Prof. Bhāndārkar—Krishna was a historic personage—What happened at the close of the Brazen Age—Devaki and Vasudeva—Vasudeva and Kansa—The birth of Krishna—Vasudeva carried the baby—The Cruel king Kansa—Krishna in Gokula—Krishna and his playmates—Krishna at Vrindavan—Krishna forgave the sins of a tailor—Krishna as a student—Christ and Krishna—Krishna and the Pandavas—Krishna in the battle of Kurukshetra—Teachings of Krishna—Krishna as a spiritual teacher—Krishna went into Samadhi.</p>	

CHAPTER III

ZOROASTER AND HIS TEACHINGS ... 53—95

Aryan peoples and their language—The Indo-Iranians—Indo-Aryans and Irano-Aryans—Hindu-Aryans retained their spiritual ideals—The story and birth of the great prophet—The significance of the word 'Zarathustra'—The Syriac and Arabic reports about Zarathustra at the age of twenty—The first Divine revelation—The vision of Zarathustra—He travelled from place to place—The third and fourth visions—The fifth and sixth visions—The teachings in Zend-Avesta—The miracle—Zarathustra's defeat of all the great philosophers and prophets—His religion—Zarathustra married three times—He preached the gospel—The great holy war against Turanian King—King Vishtasp the defender of the Faith of Zoroaster—The spread of Zoroastrianism—Zarathustra's religion was not fire-worship—Sayings of the prophet—Zoroastrianism is a religion of absolute faith—It does not teach polygamy—What does the Avesta teach—Fire and the symbol—Hymn from the Yasna—Zend-Avesta—Commands.

CHAPTER IV

LAO-TZE AND HIS TEACHINGS ... 96—138

The birth of Lao-Tze—The historical account of Lao-Tze—The term 'Tao' indicates Brahman—what is Tao—What Lao-Tze says about Tao—What says Chawag-Tze—The saying of Lao-Tze—He believed not in artificial modes of government—Lao-Tze's philosophy—Lao Tan and Confucius—The followers of Lao-Tze—Taoism was borrowed from Buddhism—Taoism and Vedanta.

CHAPTER V

BUDDHA AND HIS TEACHINGS ... 139—172

The significance of the 'Buddha'—King Siddhodhana—The birth of Buddha—Voice in the dream—Buddha and the old man—Buddha and the sick man—Buddha and the dead man—The detachment of Buddha—Buddha on the way to Rajagriha—The King Bimbisara and Buddha as Bodhisattva—Arada-Kalama—Buddha and Arada-Kalama—Bodhisattva accepted the truth of the law of Karma—Bodhisattva towards Uruvela—Bodhisattva took bath in Nairanjanā—Buddha and Māra—The first noble truth—The second noble truth—The third noble truth—The fourth noble truth—Tathagata found the middle path—The teachings of Buddha—Parable of the Lost Son—Parable of Buddha, the Sower—Parable of the Woman at the Well—parable of the Marriage Feast in Jambunada—The goal—

The five commandments—Buddha performed many miracles—Buddha became the first person of the Buddhistic Trinity—The religion of Buddha—Buddha and *nirvana*—The story of Nihilism—Buddhism and Vedanta—Buddhism teaches the rebirth of the Karma—The teachings of Vedanta—Buddhism is pessimistic.

CHAPTER VI

CHRIST AND HIS TEACHINGS 173—219

Christ as an incarnation of God—Abraham received the promise from Yahveh—King David foretold the miraculous birth—The miraculous conception of the Virgin Mary—The unknown period in the life of Jesus—Jesus and his baptism—Jesus entered into Jerusalem—Why Jesus came as a redeemer—The Song of songs—The difference of opinions regarding the time and place of the birth of Jesus—The historical record of his birth-place—Jesus, the Christ lived the simple life—What does Christmas signify.

CHAPTER VII

CHRIST AND CHRISTMAS 220—242

Jesus the Christ as the incarnation of the Father in Heaven—Balaam came to curse Israel—Malachi's prediction—The orthodox Christian belief—The Apocryphal Gospels describe many miracles—Jesus proved himself to be the Son of the living God—The super-human character of Jesus—Review of the higher critics of the Bible—The Song of songs—The time and place of the birth of Jesus—Opinions of different scholars about the date of birth of Jesus—The Christmas festival at Bethlehem—25th December as the birthday of Jesus—The birthday fixed by the ancient Egyptians—Osiris, Adonis and others—The Saturnalia festival—The birthday as fixed at Rome—The ancient German Yule feast—The Christmas trees—Gimmon on the birthday of Jesus—Jesus lived the simple life—The ideal of Christ.

CHAPTER VIII

VEDANTA AND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS 243—254

The divine Being incarnates in flesh—What do the divine incarnations teach—The Indian incarnations—Truth is always truth—The teachings of Jesus as discovered by Oriental scholars—The theory of sin and Vedanta—What did Jesus teach—Teachings of Jesus in the light of Vedanta.

CHAPTER IX

DID CHRIST TEACH A NEW RELIGION ... 255—267

The religion of Jesus—God of Jesus was not cruel and revengeful deity—The idea of the Fatherhood—Jesus appeared in Galilee—Three principal sects of the Jews—The Christian idea of the term '*Messiah*'—The Synoptic Gospels and Jesus—The influence of the Buddhist missionaries—Emperor Asoka sent missionaries to all parts of the World—The Essenes and their practices—Renan on the Essenes—The fundamental principles of the religion of Jesus—Buddha and Jesus.

CHAPTER X

MOHAMMED AND HIS TEACHINGS ... 268—292

Mohammed was born in Mecca—The records of Pliny—The idolatry in Kaaba—The idols in the Kaaba—Abdulla and Amina—Mohammed at Mecca—Mohammed in his youth—The reflective mind of Mohammed—Mohammed was resolute and taciturn—Khadiza and Mohammed—The Korish priests—Mohammed and his Divine revelation—The spiritual light in Mohammed—Mohammed at the age of forty—Gabriel and Mohammed—The Divine Commission—Mohammed at the age of forty-four—The followers of Mohammed—The revelations and Gabriel—Mohammed at the age of fifty-two—Mohammed and the Arab tribes—Carlyle about Mohammed.

CHAPTER XI

RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS TEACHINGS ... 293—321

The divine promise was fulfilled—Buddha and *Nirvāna*—Jesus the Christ—The social condition before the advent of Ramakrishna—The birth of Ramakrishna—His father and mother—Education of Ramakrishna—The boyhood of Ramakrishna—The Divine vision—The *upanayana* of Ramakrishna—In a dramatic performance—Ramakumer and Ramakrishna—Ramakumer at Dakshineswar—The magic personality—Ramakrishna as a priest in the Kali temple—His unique *Sādhana*—Ramakrishna conquered all lust and attachment—Yogesvari as his spiritual teacher—Spiritual practice under the guidance of Bhairavi—Ramakrishna and *samādhi*—Totapuri and Ramakrishna—The grand truth as realized by Ramakrishna—The ideal of religion as preached by Ramakrishna.

INTRODUCTORY

GREAT SAVIOURS OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE seers of Truth in ancient India, inspired by spiritual vision, realized the almighty Lord of the universe, and at least two thousand years before Christ declared : "That which exists is One ; men call It variously". This text of the Rig Veda, the oldest scripture of the world, proves that the conception of the one supreme Being, without a second, came as a revelation to the purified souls of those great sages. Since that remote antiquity the principle of "unity of the Supreme Being under a variety of forms", has become the cornerstone of the structure of the universal religion of Vedanta. God is one, without a second, and yet He is worshipped by different nations under various names, such as Brahman, Jehovah, Varuna, Shiva, Vishnu, Ahura Mazda, Father in Heaven, Iswara, Divine Mother, Ti, Tien, Allah, Buddha. To know that one Lord of the universe, to commune with Him, to pour-forth the supplication of our loving hearts at His feet, and in time of distress to pray to Him for help and mercy, these have always been the ideal of religion.

Age after age the great religions of the world have produced sages and saints, seers and prophets, saviours and incarnations among different races. Having obtained glimpses of that omnipotent and eternal Being, they have taught others, and directed them in the path of spiritual realization and God-vision. Each one of these great prophets has saved the world or a portion of it from the evil effects of sin and wickedness, and has rescued some souls from moral and spiritual destruction.

Is it not true that Moses, the prophet of Judaism, saved the Jewish nation from superstition and ignorance, and from lawlessness and wickedness, by giving them laws and commandments, by showing them the path of righteousness, and by instructing them in the highest moral and spiritual ideals? Think for a moment what would have been the condition of the Jews had they not received these ideals, laws and commandments from the founder of their faith! History tells us that before the advent of the great prophet of Judaism, the tribes of Israel were groping in the darkness of ignorance and superstition, and were worshipping tribal gods in the form of the bull and the calf. They were engaged in sun-worship, in kewan or Saturn worship, in tree and serpent worship, and were appeasing the wrath of their gods by bloody sacrifices, nay, by shedding human blood upon their altars. Indeed, Moses saved the Jewish people from

INTRODUCTION

utter destruction, made a nation of them, and prepared the field for the incarnation of the saviour Christ. He saw the same God who had been worshipped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, conversed with Him, and received His commandments which he afterwards delivered to his lawless and superstitious people. Thus Moses became the messenger of God, Yahveh, and the Saviour of the Jews. He also founded that great religion which still claims millions of votaries, scattered all over the world. They find peace and consolation, by following the path of Moses, and expect through his instructions to receive salvation after death.

The power and greatness which were displayed by him, were not his own, but they came direct from the supreme fountain-head of all powers and greatness. Moses himself was but an instrument in the hands of the almighty Yahveh. Shall we then wonder why the Jewish people reverentially worship the memory of their master, honour and regard him as the greatest prophet of their Lord ; and why they do not recognize any other prophet as greater than, or even equal to, the founder of Judaism ? No, it is the natural outcome of the gratitude and devotion which a nation must have for its leader, benefactor, law-giver, and saviour.

As the Jews owe to Moses their moral, spiritual and religious ideals of the higher life, so the Iranians or Parsees are indebted to their great prophet

Zoroaster ; the Chinese to Confucius and Lao-Tze ; the Christians to Christ ; the Buddhists to Buddha ; the Arabs to Mohammed, and the Hindus to their saviours. Each one of these was a leader and a law-giver to the people, among whom he was born. Lord of the universe, a prophet, and a saviour in one form or another. Each one saw God, communed with Him, received His message, and directed his people. The followers of one may not recognize the prophets and saviours of other faiths ; may not regard them as equal to their own, and may even think that theirs is only one—the greatest of all, but the truth remains the same. Whether they can see Divinity in other prophets or not, those others are nevertheless messengers of God. Believers in sectarian religions cannot realize that the Lord of the universe manifests Himself among all nations in all ages, because their spiritual eyes are blinded by the screen of fanaticism and bigotry, and they become narrow-minded, illiberal and unspiritual in their views. They are not to be blamed, for they do not possess higher perceptions, and cannot see the greatness in all these divine instruments of God.

Some people think that their forefathers (whether Jew, Parsee, Christian, Mohammedan, Chinese, Hindu, or Buddhist) were the only ones, favoured by the almighty Lord, and, consequently, the prophet who arose among them, was the greatest

INTRODUCTION

of all and the unique saviour of the world. Such ideas are entirely erroneous, for God is the just and impartial Lord of all nations, and not of one particular people. Wherever His manifestation is most needed, there does He send either His messenger, prophet, or incarnation. The difference lies only in the powers of manifestation, but all of them are mighty. If we try to limit the Infinite and all-merciful Being by our narrow ideas, and make Him finite, who else but we ourselves will be responsible for it; If we cannot recognize divinity in the prophets and saviours of other peoples, then we have not realized the divinity in the prophet of our own, and we have not understood the eternal truth of 'unity of Godhead behind the variety of names and forms'. If a mother does not recognize her own son, when he changes the colour of his garment, or puts on the dress of a foreigner, we are sure that she is not his true mother. Similarly, if a Christian who sees Divinity in Christ alone and does not know Him, when He comes in the form, of Buddha, Krishna, or in any other form, we are sure that he has not realized the Divinity of his own Master. How can we call him a true servant who does not recognize, revere, and serve his Master, when the master changes His costume? He is not truly religious who does not see unity and harmony among all prophets and incarnations of the Lord, because true religion lies not in the profession

of a creed, nor in the belief in a certain set of doctrines and dogmas, but in the realization of the eternal Truth, that the one and the same Being manifests Himself in and through a variety of forms under different names at various cycles of evolution.

According to Vedanta, the universe moves in cycles of wave forms. These waves of evolution rise, reach their zenith, and gradually subside, to rise again in another wave. This cyclic evolution is to be found on the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual planes of the universe. If we study the history of humanity we see that nation after nation has risen, reached the climax of progress and civilization, and has gradually passed into oblivion, making room for others to rise. But always we notice that on the highest plane of the spiritual evolution of mankind there is a shining soul, a prophet, a saviour, or an incarnation.

Divinity dwells on the topmost crest of the spiritual wave of humanity. Whoever reaches the summit, is transformed by that self-effulgent Light from a human into a Divine being. He becomes a God-man, a Messenger, a Saviour of the ignorant masses. Indeed, he is a part of the Divinity, he is no longer human, and through him flow the Divine powers and transcendent wisdom of the Lord. Whatever he says, is authoritative and is the standard of truth Divine. He neither reasons, nor

INTRODUCTION

argues, or does he care to give any proof for curious and unbelieving minds. By his magnetic personality, he draws around him all those who are heavily laden with the sorrows and cares of the world, and who seek peace, rest and happiness. Such great souls direct the suffering and the miserable in the path of righteousness, show them the way to salvation and the abode of blissfulness. They bring spiritual life and strength to struggling humanity. Ignorant minds alone declare that there has been only one manifestation of God, and that was the first and the last.

All true prophets and messengers of God are great. Each one of them was commissioned by the Almighty to deliver His message to the people, among whom he lived. Each one of them was a glorious Son of God, adorned with divine qualities, and a perfected soul, manifested for the good of humanity, to establish righteousness and to destroy evil.

By the law of cyclic evolution, the powers which these saviours leave behind them, rise from a small centre, and spread like a tidal wave, inundating the world and everywhere, fertilizing the soil of human minds and sowing the seeds of divine ideals. Then, in course of time, when that wave subsides, another prophet, saviour or divine incarnation appears in another place, where such a manifestation is needed, and where conditions are mature.

Moses brought the message of the Lord to the Jews who lived about 1400 years before the Christian era. His mission was suited not to the whole world for all ages, but to the tribes of Israel and their descendents. What he gave to them, was a blessing. No one prophet or saviour has ever succeeded in bringing all people of the world under his power and direction, nor will he succeed in ruling over the world for ever. Time brings changes, and new manifestations will be necessary. No one can say : "My master will be the master of all nations and will fulfil the spiritual needs of all ages". Would to God that it were possible for one such manifestation to supply the demands of all nations for all ages and for all climes ! This world then would have been saved from religious quarrels, fights, persecutions, and inhuman bloodshed. But that could not be, because unity in variety is the keynote of the divine will. It works through various forms, but the ideal of spirituality always remains the same. Who can change the divine plan !

What the Jewish people needed about 1400 years before Christ, was not required among the Hindus at that time ? History shows that the evolution of their minds was on a different plane ; they were not lawless, nor were they worshipping tribal gods, planets and trees. They had the conception of one supreme Being, and, consequently, they wanted

INTRODUCTION

something different from what Moses gave to the Jews, and to fulfil their demands and prayers, came in India, Sri Krishna as their saviour. He is worshipped by millions of Hindus as the incarnation of God, and is regarded in the same light as Christ is in Christendom, for he has fulfilled the needs of that country.

Again, about 660 B. C. the Iranians, the ancient inhabitants of Persia, reached the culmination of culture and spirituality, and upon the crest of that spiritual wave, appeared the shining soul of the prophet Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism. He gave to those people what they required. Moses could not reach them, nor could any other prophet fulfil their needs and longings. About the same time there arose in China Lao-Tze and Confucius who granted to the Chinese whatever they needed, and showing them the path of morality and righteousness, became the saviours of China. Lao-Tze established the highest ideals of true spirituality, and Confucius gave the code of ethics, both bringing salvation to their people from wickedness and immorality. This tidal wave at that age covered the vast area of the Asiatic continent. Prophets, sages and saviours arose in its different parts, and on the highest point of the wave there appeared in India another great saviour in the form of Gautama Buddha, the illustrious founder of the Buddhist Faith. He brought the divine message

of noble Truths, which he gave to the world, and saved millions of souls from sorrow, suffering, misery, disease, death, self-delusion and ignorance, and showed them the path to *nirvana*. Nearly six hundred years after Buddha, a period which is roughly calculated by Oriental scholars as the cycle of a new spiritual wave, the glorious Son of God incarnated in Palestine in the form of Jesus the Christ. He gave his message to the world, and whether the world accepted it at that time or not, is not the question, He fulfilled his mission and passed away.

But that light, which shone before the world from the centre of Palestine, could not dispel the darkness of Arabia. The Arabs remained in ignorance, superstition and idolatry, until six hundred years after Christ, when appeared Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, who gave salvation to his people, showed them the path of righteousness, and led them away from their lawlessness to the worship of the one Lord of the universe, under the name of Allah.

About the same time, in India, a tremendous unrest was caused by the corrupted form of Buddhism which had swept away the higher ideals of ethics and religion. Atheistic and agnostic views replaced the worship of one supreme Deity. The Hindus needed a re-adjustment or a re-establishment of the universal truth, and then arose Sankara-

INTRODUCTION

charya, who revealed the ancient faith and re-established the universal religion of Vedanta. Sankaracharya is regarded in India as the incarnation of Siva and the embodiment of divine wisdom. About six hundred years after him, Ramanuja appeared in the South. Both of them are revered, honoured, and worshipped as incarnations of divine Love and as the saviours of mankind. They preached that the Lord of the universe is infinite Love, and that whosoever worship Him with wholehearted love and true devotion, will attain to salvation and everlasting bliss. Lastly, in the nineteenth century, there came Bhagavan Sri Ramkrishna with his mission for the people of this age as well as for the future. His message was to establish the universal religion and to destroy the evils of sectarianism, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness. He is worshipped today in India as Christ is in Christendom, and is regarded by his followers as a saviour of mankind and as the consummation of all the prophets and saviours of the past. It is believed that his message is most fitted for the present age of science and rationalism. Ramakrishna gave a death blow to all religious intolerance and fanaticism, by emphasizing the truth that all sects are like different paths which lead to the same goal. He propagated his mission among the most enlightened classes of people in modern India, and it is now spreading all over the world. In this cycle of reason and science,

one cannot remain sectarian and hold dogmatic ideas and narrow views. This is the spirit of the age, and it needs such a manifestation as the embodiment of non-sectarianism, toleration and universal sympathy for all religions.

Some of these great ones are recognized by the masses as prophets, some as messengers of God, while others are worshipped as divine incarnations and saviours of humanity. Moses, Confucius, and Mohammed are called prophets of the Lord ; Zoroaster and Lao-Tze are regarded as the messengers of God, while Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Ramakrishna are classed with the saviours of the world. Each of these has fulfilled his divine mission, by setting an example of purity, unselfishness and disinterested love for all. Each has shown the path of salvation from sin and suffering, and has established the highest ideals of spirituality. Each has led human beings to the abode of truth and happiness beyond the ocean of death. The followers of each have obtained immortal life and Godconsciousness. Shall we deny such messengers of God ? Shall we remain so blind as not to see the divine manifestation in these great ones ? Shall we be so narrow, intolerant and prejudiced, as to accept only one saviour, simply because our forefathers worshipped him, and on that very ground alone, reject and disregard the other prophets and saviours of the world ? Nay ! The time has come,

INTRODUCTION

when we must put aside all sectarianism and bigotry, and become broad and liberal, so as to follow them all, and place them upon the altar of that universal religion, which is all-embracing and infinite in its scope. No sectarian religion has ever been tolerant enough to accept the teachings of all prophets and saviours of all nations. If this were possible, the world would be different. But today, by the light of scientific knowledge, we are able to recognize the various divine manifestations of all countries.

In this age of reason, people are beginning to outgrow all opinions and limitations. The death-knell of dogmas, creeds, and fanaticism has been sounded, and the sincere seekers after truth are brought near the threshold of that universal religion which is nameless. They are more ready now than ever before, to see unity and harmony underneath the diver and do not see it, who is to be blamed? For the message has come to us and we should receive it: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you". Let us open our eyes and behold the divine glory and realize the greatness of our souls! Blessed are they who have become followers of this grand universal religion!

A preacher of the universal religion is one who has seen God and has realized Divinity in all of those who are worshipped as the incarnations of God and the saviours of the world. Such a preacher

is very rare. If you ask me whether I have seen God, I will answer : "He that hath seen the Son hath also seen the Father." The latest manifestation of Divinity was in the form of Bhagavân Sri Râmakrishna. Him I have seen, therefore, I have seen God, and through him I have realized Christ, Buddha, Chaitanya, Krishna and other great prophets and saviours. Whoever worships Râmakrishna, consciously or unconsciously, worships Christ, Buddha, Krishna as well as the God of the universal religion who is nameless and formless. Have we not heard that message which he has given to the world again and again . "He who was Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Râma, Chaitanya, has now become Râmakrishna", Shall we not receive that divine message ? Shall we not listen to that voice ? Yes, because his utterances contain the spirit of this age. We must consider them seriously before we turn a deaf ear to them. Why did Râmakrishna say that ? If there were no truth in it, what object could have been gained by him, who lived most of his life in divine communion without seeking anything from anybody, and who renounced all worldly relations for realization of the eternal Being ? He used to say : "My divine Mother has shown me this truth ; I do not know why". He considered himself as the child of God who is both Father and Mother of the universe.

The Lord of the universe graciously reveals

INTRODUCTION

Himself in that special form, to which the earnest sincere, and purified soul of a true devotee is attached to fulfil his prayers and to give enlightenment, spiritual strength, and salvation. If we are devoted to Buddha, Krishna, Jehovah or to any other form, we shall realize God, through that particular manifestation which we love with our whole heart and soul. Whosoever wishes to receive divine grace should ceaselessly pray to Him as Christ, Zoroaster, Mohammed and Râmakrishna did at all hours of the day and night. The Lord will surely grant the prayers of His faithful devotee, and save him from sorrow, suffering, misery, disease, and death. Have faith in the Lord and do not doubt even for a moment. "He who has faith has everything, and he who doubts has nothing"—this is the teaching of all messengers of God and of all the saviours of the world. All prophets and Divine incarnations are unanimous on this one point that faith is constructive and doubt is destructive. Therefore we must have faith, first in ourselves as children of God, then in the divine Ideal, the eternal Father and Mother of the universe, and then in the saviour or the master who represents that ideal, and everything else will be added unto us.

The Lord says: "Whosoever comes to Me through whatsoever path, I reach him ; all men are struggling in the paths which ultimately lead to Me, the Infinite Abode of bliss and love".

CHAPTER II

KRISHNA AND HIS TEACHINGS

KRISHNA, the Christ of India, is regarded as a saviour of mankind, and his teachings are known as the *Bhagavad Gitâ* or the *Song Celestial*. Those who have studied this divine Ode, have often wondered at the vast wisdom of its teacher, and have asked : "Who was Krishna ? When did he live, and what were his works ?" Oriental scholars and Christian missionaries have often compared his life and teachings with those of Jesus the Christ. Some of them have denied the historical personality of Krishna, while others have tried to prove that he was a mythical god of ancient India, and that he did not exist at all. Again, after noticing the wonderful similarity that exists between the lives of Krishna and Christ, many have come to the conclusion that the whole story of Krishna's life and teachings is based upon the life and sayings of Jesus the Christ, and that the Krishna-cult of the Hindus did not exist before the first invasion of that country by the early Christian missionaries. Furthermore, some of the followers of the Christ were so astonished at finding in India a religion so near like their own that they could only account for it, by supposing that the Devil, foreseeing the



Sri Krishna
Sri Nandalal Bose

advent of their saviour, originated a system of religion in advance of his and just like it.

All these ingenious explanations of the Christian scholars and missionaries have not succeeded in quenching the fire of reverence, devotion, and love, which was kindled upon the altar of the Hindu heart by the unparalleled character and divine powers of Krishna, the God-Incarnate, and the saviour of mankind.

Waves of conquest and religious fanaticism have come over India from the West one after another, and have swept away by their tremendous on-rush millions and millions of lives and the most glorious spiritual monuments which that country had produced. But still the marvellous ideal and the spiritual kingdom of the sin-atonement Krishna have remained for ages firm as the unshakable Himalayas, defying their strength and destructive power. The fanatical Mohammedans invaded India, holding their scripture, the Koran in one hand and a sword in the other, and brought terror and havoc in the heart of Hindu communities, ruined the temples of Krishna, looted the country, massacred the innocent priests and priestesses, sages, and saints, and converted many to their faith of Islam by mere brute force; notwithstanding all this, the illimitable powers of the divine Krishna have survived the ravages of time. He still reigns over the hearts of the Hindu

people, and will continue to reign in time to come.

In the present age, the Christian missionaries, supported by the enormous resources of the English-speaking nations, are trying with head and heart to place their ideal Jesus upon the altar of Khishna and to convert his followers to their religion, but the undying divine powers which Krishna has manifested, will surely be able to withstand the futile efforts of ordinary mortals.

The name of Krishna is heard in almost every corner of the Hindu community throughout the length and breadth of the vast empire. His sweet and holy name is uttered and reverentially repeated at all hours of the day, in sleeping, in waking, in working, in prosperity, in adversity, and in times of woe and suffering as well as during festivities and national rejoicings. The popular songs which are sung in India by the illiterate masses, describe the superhuman deeds and boyish sports of the divine Krishna, the shepherd of mankind. In victory and in defeat, in nuptial ceremony or crematory rite, at the time of birth and death, the name of Krishna is uttered by millions of worshippers with the deepest feelings of devotion, love, and reverence. In short, they have coupled the name of Krishna with everything that takes place upon the earth whether good, bad, or indifferent. For the last three thousand years he has ruled over the heart of

the nation as the most beloved lord and saviour of all.

The life of Krishna, to the Hindu mind, is as historical as the life of Jesus the Christ to the Christian. It is, of course, a well-known fact that no one has yet succeeded in giving authentic evidences to establish the truth of all the stories that we read in the synoptic Gospels regarding the life of the Christ. On the contrary, the historic personality of Jesus has been denied over and over again by the most able scholars and higher critics of Europe and America. Still the majority of Christians, disregarding their opinions, believe in the Lord Christ as a historic personage, worship him, revere him, and expect to obtain salvation through him after death. Similar is the case with Krishna, the Hindu Christ. There have been scholars in India who have denied his historic personality. Some have regarded him as a mythical deity, while others have given authentic proofs of his earthly career. The masses of people however do not recognize such criticisms, but consider Krishna as a veritable personage who lived among the Hindu people as a great hero, and showed his divine powers in order to establish his spiritual kingdom on earth. Whether or not we can give the exact time, data, and year of the advent of Krishna, so far it is certain that his name was known in India hundreds of years before the

Christian era. Centuries before Christ, Krishna was not only loved, honoured, and worshipped, but was recognized by the vast majority of Hindus as God-Incarnate and Saviour of mankind. The most authentic evidence in favour of this point can be gathered from the accounts of Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador of Selucus, who lived in India in the court of Chandragupta, the Buddhist monarch, in the fourth century B. C.

After the invasion of India by Alexander the Great between 333 and 327 B. C., Selucus Nikator became his successor, and ruled over the entire region between the Euphrates and the Indus, and sent his ambassador to the court of Chandragupta, the reigning emperor of India. These are all historical facts, Megasthenes lived in India for several years, and left some records describing his experiences there, which have been preserved and handed down by Arrian the Greek historian. Among other things Megasthenes says: "He, the Indian Heracles, excelled all men in strength of body and spirit, he had purged the whole earth and sea of evil and founded many cities; and after his death, divine honours were paid to him". "This Heracles is especially worshipped by the Sourasenians, an Indian nation, in whose land are two great cities, Mathura and Cleisobara, and through it flows the navigable river Johares

(Jamuna)".¹ This Cleisobara of Chrysobara is identified by some with Calisapura,² but it was supposed by Pliny the historian to be the same as Krishna-Pura, the city of Krishna—probably modern Dwârkhâ, which was founded by Krishna. Ptolemais mentions Mathura as the city of the gods. Prof. Lassen identifies this Indian Heracles with Krishna, while Prof. Wilson and other Oriental scholars think that the Heracles of the Greek writers was indubitably Balarâm, the brother of Krishna.

Respecting the Hercules of India, Captain Wilford says : "The Indian Hercules, according to Cicero, was called Belus. He is the same as Bala, the brother of Krishna, and both are conjointly worshipped at Mathura ; indeed, they are considered as one Avatâra or Incarnation of Vishnu. Bala is represented as a stout man with a club in his hand. He is called also Balarâma. As Bala springing from Vishnu or Heri³ he is certainly Hericula, Heri-culas, Hercules".⁴

Arrian says that Alexander the Great saw those

1- Translation of 'Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander and Indica*,' by E. J. Chinnoek, p. 408,

2. Vide Higgins' *Anacalypsis*, Vol. I, P. 329.

3. 'Heri,' in Sanskrit, 'Hari'—means a Saviour ; and 'Cula', the direct descent from a family. Therefore, Hercules means a direct descendant of Hari, the saviour. This word, according to Higgins, is admitted to be neither Greek nor Latin, but of barbarian origin.—Cf. *Anacalypsis*, Vol. I, p. 329.

4. *Asiatic Reserches*, Vol. V. p. 270.

cities and other kingdoms governed by Surasenas, or the descendants of the royal family of Krishna. "Both Arrian and Strabo assert that the God Krishna was anciently worshipped in Mathura on the river Jumna, where he is worshipped at this day, but the emblems and attributes essential to this deity are also transplanted into the mythologies of the West".⁵

These historical accounts show how unfounded are the remarks of the Christian missionaries who believe that the whole story of the life of Krishna and his teachings was based upon those of Jesus the Christ. On the contrary, it is proved that Krishna existed centuries before Christ, and his teachings were already in writing at the time of the invasion of Alexander the Great, Sir William Jones, the father of Oriental scholars in Sanskrit, after residing in India for several years, said : "That the name of Chrishna⁶ and the general outline of his history were known in India long anterior to the birth of our Saviour and probably to the time of Homer (900 B. C.) we know very certainly".⁷

Sir Godfrey Higgins, one of the best English scholars and antiquarians of the last century, after making proper investigations and researches as far as he could, came to the conclusion that Krishna

5. Quoted in *Monumental Christianity*, pp. 151, 152,

6. Sir William Jones always spells the name of this personago, 'Chrishna'.

7. *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. I, p. 273.

lived at the end of the Brazen Age. "He passed a life of the most extraordinary and incomprehensible devotion, His birth was concealed from the tyrant Kansa, to whom it had been predicted that one born at that time and in that family would destroy him, i. e., his power".⁸ Mr. Higgins says : "In fact the sculptures on the walls of the most ancient temples—temples by no one ever doubted to be long anterior to the Christian era, as well as written works equally old, prove beyond the possibility of doubt, the superior antiquity of the history of Crishna to that of Jesus". Again, he refutes the arguments of his opponents against the antiquity of Krishna by saying : "Cristna, his statues, temples and books, etc., respecting him are to be found where a Christian never came. Is it not absurd to suppose that the Brâhmîns could invent the story of Crishna and make it dovetail into all their other superstitions—make him form an integral part of their curious Trinity, the actual Trinity of ancient Persia and of Plato—make him also fit into the theological inferences of the modern Christians respecting the meaning of the first chapter of Genesis—make his story exactly agree with the orthodox massacre of the innocents, and finally make all this be received as an ancient doctrine and article of faith by millions of people, who must have

8. Ibid, p, 273.

9. *Anacalypsis*, Vol. I, p. 160.

known very well that it was all perfectly new to them and that they had never heard of it before".¹⁰

Captain Wilford, in his *Chronology of the Hindus*, fixed the date of Krishna and Parasara, who were contemporaneous with the Emperor Yudhisthira, as about 1180 B. C. while the astronomer Davis, as well as Colebrooke, believed that they lived as early as 1391 B. C. Mr. W. Brennard, the author of the *Hindu Astronomy*, says: "The received opinion, however, as before stated, is that Yudhisthira (with Garga and Parâsara) lived some time about the 12th or 13th centuries before the Christian era".¹¹

Furthermore, the most ancient sculpture of India in the Cave of Elephanta, near Bombay, representing the ferocious figure of King Kansa (like the Herod of the Cristian Bible), surrounded by slaughtered infant boys and holding a drawn sword, cannot be accounted for even by the ingenious theory of the Christian missionaries. This fact not only proves that Krishna lived centuries before Christ, but also establishes the antiquity of the whole story of His miraculous birth, His escape from the tyrant Kansa, the infanticide by this wicked King and the other principal events of the divine life of this Saviour.

The popular belief among the orthodox Hindus is that He lived towards the end of *Dwâpara Yuga*

10. Ibid, p. 337.

11. Cf. '*Hindu Astronomy*', p. 119.

or the Brazen Age and the present Iron Age, or *Kali Yuga* began on the very day when Krishna ascended to heaven. According to this belief or tradition, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and others have fixed the historical date of Krishna and of the battle of Kurukshetra, as 1430 B. C.¹²

But the modern Hindu scholars hold that he must have lived about 3091 B. C.

Although the name Krishna occurs many times in the Hymns of the Rig Veda, such as in verse 23, Hymn 116, Book or Mandala I; also in verse 7, Hymn 117, Mandala I—Oriental scholars cannot trace the identity of this Krishna, and whether he was the son of Devaki and Vasudeva. In one passage of the Chândogya Upanishad, we find the name of Krishna, the son of Devaki. Again, Krishna was also the inspired Rishi (seer) of many Hymns (85-87 of *Mandala VIII*; and 42-44 of *Mandala X*) of the Rig Veda. From this we learn that He was contemporaneous with Vyâsa who divided the Vedas into four parts.

The Sanskrit Grammarian, Pânini, who lived in the eleventh century B. C., mentions the name of

12. Cf. '*Krishnacharitra*', by B. C. Chatterjee, p. 22, also pp. 43-48. According to this author the Emperor, Yudhisthira, a contemporary of Krishna, lived 1115 years before Chandragupta the great Buddhist monarch, who defeated Seleucus Nikator, the successor of Alexander the Great, in a battle, and drove the Greeks out of India, becoming the Emperor of India in 315 B. C. He married the daughter of Seleucus. - Therefore the date of Yudhisthira was $315 + 1115 = 1430$ B. C.

Yudhisthira, Arjuna and Vâsudeva (the son of Vasudeva), another name of Krishna,

Furthermore, in the Mahâbhâshya, or the Great Commentary by Patanjali on Pânini's Sanskrit Grammar, which dates at least the second century B. C., we find convincing proof that the story of Krishna and Kansa was current and popular during his lifetime, and that Krishna was worshipped as a God.

Prof. Bhândârkâr of Bombay mentions the following allusions to Krishna in the Mahâbhâshya :

(1) That the stories of the death of Kansa and the subjugation of Bali were popular and current in Patanjali's time.

(2) That Krishna or Vâsudeva was mentioned in the story as having killed Kansa.

(3) That such stories formed the subjects of dramatic representations, as Pourânic stories are still popularly represented on the Hindu stage.

(4) That the event of Kansa's death at the hands of Krishna was in Patanjali's time believed to have occurred at a very remote time.¹³

Another convincing proof that Krishna was an important Deity in India, long before any Christians visited the country, we gather from the Bhitârî pillar inscription, dating probably the second century A. D., which was transcribed and translated by Dr.

13. *Indian Antiquary*, Bombay, Vol. III (1874), p. 16.

W. H. Mill. The passage in Dr. Mill's translation reads thus : "May he who is like Krishna, still obeying his mother Devaki, after his foes are vanquished, he of golden rays with mercy protect this my design".¹⁴ The German antiquarian Lassen corrects it thus : "Like the conqueror of his enemies, Krishna encircled with golden rays, who honours Devaki, may he maintain his purpose".¹⁵

These evidences will be enough for our present purpose to convince the reader that Krishna was a historic personage, and that He lived centuries before Christ.

Now let us see under what circumstances he was born. If we study the monumental Sanskrit works of the ancient Hindu writers, which describe the life of our hero, we shall find that long before the advent of Krishna, it was prophesied by ancient Hindu sages and seers of Truth, that in the latter part of the Brazen Age and before the beginning of the *Kali-Yuga* or the present cycle, when the earth would be over-burdened with sin, evil and evil doers, a divine saviour would incarnate in the royal house of Yadu, would be born of Devaki, a holy virgin, and relieve the oppressed earth of its burden of sin and sorrow. Captain Wilford, the English antiquarian, referring to this prophecy said : "The advent of their saviour Krishna occurred in

14. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, January, 1837, pp. 1-17.

15. *Indische Alterthumskunde*, ii (1849), p. 1108, note.

exact fulfillment of a prophecy found in their sacred books”.

As the close of the Brazen Age was coming nigh, the signs of sin and evil such as wickedness, treachery, murder, ill-treatment of women and children, moral and spiritual depravity were visible in almost all parts of India. Kings and their subjects became extremely sinful ; priests and priestesses grew insincere and hypocritical ; the worship of the supreme Being, the one Lord of the universe, was regarded as useless, and the masses of people, instead of worshipping Him, were devoted to the minor *Devas* or bright spirits, such as Indra, Agni, and others, and offered bloody sacrifices to propitiate them. Kings grew tyrannical, and sages and the saints found no peace, being constantly threatened, oppressed and over-taxed by these despotic monarchs. At such a period of the decline of virtue and righteousness, the most cruel and wicked king of the royal line of Yadu, deposed his God-fearing father, Ugrasena, and usurped the throne of Mathura, the holy city and capital of Hindustan. His name was Kansa. He was so tyrannical that the bare mention of his name was enough to terrorize all, and to send a thrill of panic and despair through the hearts of those who were good and peaceloving. He was so wicked and despotic that he would slaughter anybody and dispense no justice. Although he was so unrighteous and sinful, he had a sister

whose name was Devaki (the divine woman), who was very pious, pure and chaste. In the Hindu scriptures, she is described as one, through whom the designs of the Lord were accomplished. She spent most of her time in solitude and contemplation of the supreme Deity, would burst into tears at the sight of her brother's cruelty, and prayed day and night for peace, justice and righteousness among the people. No animal food ever touched her lips. This description reminds one of the character of Mary the mother of Jesus, as given in the *Gospel of Mary*, where it is said that no animal food ever touched her lips.

Devaki was given in marriage to a good man of royal blood, by name Vasudeva (the divine Vasu). Before the marriage ceremony was completed, the king suddenly heard a celestial voice warning him : "The fruit of this marriage shall be the cause of thy death and shall overthrow thy kingdom". Hearing this King Kansa was startled. He flew into a rage, drew his sword and ran after his sister to kill her on the spot. The newly married husband, Vasudeva, intervened and begged of him to save the life of his innocent wife. King Kansa did not know what to do. He retreated, but said that he could save her life only on one condition and that he would destroy all of her children immediately after their birth. Vasudeva, with a broken heart and finding no other way out of this unforeseen situation, was obliged to

agree to the inhuman proposition of the brutal king Kansa, and promised that he would present to him all children that would be born of them. The king then withdrew, trembling with anger and fear, reluctantly sparing the life of his sister who would be the mother of his enemy and destroyer.

The newly married couple were extremely unhappy and miserable at this unforeseen event. The unfortunate Vasudeva and Devaki, followed by a large crowd of friends and relatives, left the palace, and crossing the sacred river Jamuna by boat, went to Gokula, where Vasudeva's friends and relatives, headed by Nanda, the shepherd chief of the town, had arranged a grand reception for the wedding party. But they soon discovered that both Vasudeva and his wife Devaki were trying to suppress the outburst of their sorrowful hearts; that they were most unhappy and miserable, and that they were mourning over some kind of misfortune that had befallen them. When the weeping Vasudeva described the cause of their sorrow, the sad news came to Nanda and his friends like thunder rending their tender hearts and crushing all feelings of joy and happiness which they would have experienced on such an occasion. The whole company began to cry for help and protection against the wicked deeds of the heartless tyrant king Kansa. But Nanda, who was a wise and spiritual soul, soon realized that it was the will of the Lord that such a

thing had happened, and consoled the suffering couple by asking them to resign themselves to the mercy of the supreme. Vasudeva and Devaki attained peace in their minds by surrendering their own will to the Divine dispensation.

Vasudeva lived quietly with Devaki in Gokula and enjoyed the peace and happiness of a righteous family life. In course of time, Devaki became the mother of a beautiful male child. Vasudeva, true to his promise, sent the glad news to Kansa who instantly ordered his demoniac attendants to bring the child to him. When they obeyed the royal command, the cruel king with his own hands destroyed the little thing. In this way Vasudeva had to sacrifice seven children, like the seven Maccabean brothers, before the son of God came to him to relieve the earth of her load of sin and evil.

Before the birth of his eighth son, Vasudeva came with his wife to Mathura to pay taxes to king Kansa.¹⁶ The cruel and heartless king, hearing that Devaki was going to be a mother, imprisoned them both in the dark cell of a dungeon within the compound of the palace. There the innocent couple had to spend many days and nights without food, drink, or any kind of comfort whatever. They passed their time in extreme agony, praying to the Lord every hour of the day for relief from the diabolical persecutions of the tyrant. Their hands and feet were

¹⁶. Cf. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to be taxed. (Luke, Ch. II. 4, 5.)

chained with heavy iron chains, and they were watched day and night by armed sentinels.

At last, after midnight on the eighth day of the moon, in the Hindu month of Bhâdra (about the middle of August). When every creature was enjoying sound sleep, the divine Son descended upon this earth in a dark cave of that prison. Immediately after his birth, the whole cave was illumined by the celestial light which emanated from the body of the new-born saviour. The *Devas* (angels) appeared in the cell, singing the praise of Krishna and his holy mother, bowed down at his feet, called him the incarnation of Vishnu, the second person of the Hindu Trinity, and worshipped him with flowers, while celestial music filled the atmosphere. These unusual events frightened the parents, as they did not know what was going to happen, but remembering the fate of their seven children, they burst forth into tears and prostrating themselves on their faces, cried aloud in utter despair : "O Lord, why hast Thou sent Thy son to us in this prison ? How can we save his life ? Have mercy upon us and protect Thy child from the hands of that cruel and inhuman king Kansa". When they were weeping, crying and praying, the babe comforted his parents by saying : 'O mother, O father, weep no more ; thy troubles and cares are over. I have come to rescue thee and save mankind. Behold my divine power'. The child then manifested his spiritual glory and showed them his transfiguration. He said : "Carry

me, O father, to thy friend Nanda who lives in Gokula ; cross the Jamuna river, exchange me with his newborn infant and return here", Thus saying, he became the babe once more, and from this time began the manifestations of the most Wonderful powers of the Lord, the heavy iron chains were loosed, the doors of the seven gates of the palace were unlocked, and opened at midnight, and the sentinels, who had been watching over them, enjoyed, as it were, the sleep of death, and did not know what was happening. Vasudeva carried the baby in his arms, covering him with swaddling cloths, and went to the banks of the Jamuna. The mighty river with its swift current gave way, and he forded it easily, and the water not rising above his knees, Thus Vasudeva crossed the waters safely in the dead of night, and arrived at the home of his friend Nanda. The doors of the house opened miraculously, and he entered into the nursery, where he found a child, playing in a basket (almost like the basket which they use today for feeding the cattle), exchanged the babes unnoticed by any mortal, took the other in his arms, and came back the same way to Mathura before daybreak.

In the meantime, Nârada, who is described in Hindu mythology as the messenger of God, who can go freely to any place in no time, appeared before the wise men, sages, saints, and innocent shepherds, heralding like the morning star the

advent and glorious rise of the divine sun, the saviour of mankind. The next morning the shepherds and wise men, saints, and sages came from all quarters to see the son of God, worshipped him, and presented the offerings of curd, milk, flowers, fruit, gold, and incense at his holy feet. The wise men noticed in his little form the signs of an Avatâra or incarnation of the supreme Deity, and gave him the name Krishna, the redeemer of the world.

There in the palace, the cruel king Kansa was notified by his attendants that a child was born in the cell of the prison. Immediately the babe was brought before him, but when he looked at it, finding that it was a female child, he flew into a rage of anger, and exclaimed : "The wicked child is trying to deceive me, I shall get rid of it immediately." Seizing the infant in his hands to throw it on a stone, as he advanced, he stumbled, and the child slipped out of his hold, laughed and disappeared in the air, declaring in a thundering voice : "He who will destroy thy power is growing in Gokula." It is said in the Hindu scriptures that in this manner inscrutable divine powers were manifested by Krishna, the lord of all. Immediately King Kansa ordered that all male children in Gokula must be destroyed, and sent around demoniac persons to kill Krishna and his step-brother Balarâma, who were growing in that neighbourhood. This description is more authentic than that of the infanticide of

Herod, because king Kansa, like Herod of the New Testament, was a historic person. Christian scholars and higher critics of the Bible, however, maintain that king Herod had died at least ten years before Christ was born.

The divine powers that were manifested through the body of Krishna were able to overcome all the evil influences and destructive forces that came towards him, and he destroyed all those demons and wicked persons who were sent by Kansa. Many miracles are described in the Sanskrit literature relating to the life of Krishna, which may not be interesting to Western readers, but some of those miraculous events are similar to those found in the life of Jesus, as described in the Apocryphal Gospel of I, Infancy. As Krishna grew older, he lived in Gokula, and played in the most beautiful forests and groves of Vrindâvana. There his playmates were his step-brother Balarâma, the shepherd boys and shepherd girls. They all recognized in Krishna divine powers, used to make wreaths of wild flowers and tender leaves of wild trees, weave crowns of them, and place them on his head, calling him the king of shepherds.

Krishna used to dance with the shepherd boys and girls, play the flute and sing, captivating the hearts of all by his sweet, musical voice. Even at this age between eight and twelve, Krishna displayed his super-human powers, and attracted the devout souls of the inhabitants, making them feel

the presence of divinity in their midst, and they all, in turn, revered and honoured him as their Lord, their master and their king.

Krishna at one time found that all the cattle, sheep, and his playmates (the cowboys and girls) were lying dead, having been poisoned by drinking the water of the lake Kâliya, in which lived the demon of a huge serpent, who wished to destroy all the friends of Krishna. He jumped into the lake, assuming the weight of the three worlds, as it were, and, standing on the head of the serpent, bruised it and tamed the demon. He then brought the dead cattle and shepherd boys and girls back to life. In India, there are pictures and statues of Krishna with a huge serpent at his holy feet.

In this manner, Krishna spent his childhood and the early part of his youth working miracles, resuscitating the dead, healing lepers, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and defending the weak against the strong and the oppressed against the oppressor. Even at this age, he established the worship of the one supreme God, and abolished sacrifices to the minor gods like Indra. At one time all the inhabitants of Vrindâvana were engaged in the worship of Indra, the Vedic god of thunder and rain. Seeing this, Krishna said : "What is the use of praying to the minor *Deva* Indra, the god of thunder ? Be devoted to the supreme Lord, and see His presence in all human beings. Feed the poor, and give to the needy." It is said that Indra

grew extremely angry, and deluged the earth with torrents of rain to destroy his enemies; but Krishna saved the lives of his followers by miraculously protecting them in the cave of Govardhana mountain. There he transfigured himself into his divine form, and showed his superhuman powers to all.

Again, Krishna is said to have revived the life of a widow's son who was dead. After performing all these and many other miraculous deeds in his pastoral life, he, as he reached his youth, determined to return to the city of Mathura, which was goverend by the tyrant Kansa, to fulfil the ancient prophecy, by destroying the powers of that wicked king. On his way, he was followed by a multitude of shepherds and shepherdesses. He entered the city, dressed as a shepherd boy, but all the inhabitants hailed him as their king. In the crowd, a hunchbacked woman, Kubjâ by name, came near Krishna, and anointed him with oil and sandal-wood paste. Krishna, in return, pardoned her sins, made her straight and beautiful, and promised that his regard for her would remain perpetual. Even to this day, if we go to Mathura we will hear everybody speaking of the good fortune of this deformed woman. We may compare this with the account of the deformed woman given in Luke, Chap. XIII, verses 11, 12.

Krishna also forgave the sins of a tailor who adorned him with royal robes. Thus, in the midst of loud acclamations of joy rising from the souls of

all the inhabitants, Krishna, accompanied by his heroic brother, Balarâma, entered the palace of Kansa, fought with the wicked king and his party, and won the victory of righteousness over evil, by destroying him and his sinful comrades. Thus Krishna, having fulfilled the old prophecy, went down to the dungeon of the prison to release his father Vasudeva, his mother Devaki and Ugrasena, the aged father of Kansa who had been treacherously deposed by his wicked son from the throne of Mathura. According to the Hindu law, Krishna, being the conqueror of Kansa, had absolute right to the throne of Mathura, but he showed his greatness and dislike for earthly powers by installing Ugrasena on the throne, and restoring to him his lawful kingdom. Thus our divine hero re-established peace and righteousness among the inhabitants of the vast realm. All people rejoiced at this change, especially the parents of Krishna, when they realized that it was their own son who had brought an end to their misery and suffering, and fulfilled the divine promise.

From this time Krishna lived happily with his parents and friends in Mathura for a few months, and did not return to Vrindâvana to stay with his foster-parents—the shepherd king Nanda, and his wife Yashodâ.

Up to this age Krishna had received no education of any kind. So his parents sent him and his step-brother Balarâma to Benaras (the Athens of

Ancient India, and the seat of science, philosophy and Vedic wisdom) to study under Sandipani, the great sage and spiritual teacher. It is said, in the Mahâbhârata, that Krishna mastered all sciences and Vedic wisdom in twenty-four hours, and that seeing his uncommon talents the sage marvelled and exclaimed that Krishna was not a man, but verily, the God of wisdom in human form. However, Krishna, following the custom of a Hindu student, lived with his tutor for some time. During this period he practised austerities, penance, fasting and all spiritual exercises enjoined in the science of Yoga. The Mahâbhârata says that he, finding his spiritual master, Sandipani, mourning over his dead son, asked him what he could do to relieve him of his sorrow. Sandipani, knowing that Krishna was not an ordinary mortal, begged of him to bring his son back to life.

It is said that Krishna, in search of the soul of the boy, plunged into the sea, where he encountered the demon of a dragon, fought him, killed him, took his huge shell, and finally went down into Hades. He blew the giant's shell which made such a terrific noise that all the inhabitants of Hades were frightened by it. Krishna, the saviour of sinners, was moved at the sight of their sufferings and graciously pardoned their sins and sent them to celestial regions. At last, finding the soul of Sandipani's son, he miraculously brought him back to the earth, and offered him to his master. A similar story of

going down to the Hades is described in the life of Jesus the Christ in the sixteenth chapter of the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. The only difference in the description is that when Christ went to the door of Hades the inhabitants heard a voice of thunder and the rushing of winds. On another occasion, Krishna is said to have revived the dead child of Uttarâ.

After he returned to Mathura from Benaras, Krishna discovered that the city was under a siege by the enormous army of Jarâsandha, the powerful King of Magadha (modern Behar), and the father-in-law of the dead King Kansa. Krishna, by his commanding skill, succeeded in routing the army, and raising the siege of the city. Jarâsandha attacked again and again (seventeen times), in order to take revenge and to punish the slayer of his son-in-law.

Krishna, desiring to avoid such repeated attacks, moved the capital of Ugrasena's kingdom to the Island of Dwârkâ., where he built a large city, well protected by sea and high mountains. But Jarâsandha continued his attacks against Dwârakâ until he was defeated and killed by Bhima, the giant like brother of Arjuna.

Born of a warrior caste, Krishna was unrivalled in strength and heroic valour. Even at the time of his marriage with Rukmini, the most beautiful daughter of Bhishmaka, the king of Vidarbha, he showed his heroism by outwitting Jarâsandha and

Sishupâla, who were his rivals and bitter opponents.

He installed Yudhisthira, the eldest brother of the Pândavas on the throne of Hastinâpura as the Emperor of India, and thus, as a king-maker, he settled the destiny, not only of the ruling monarchs of India, but of the whole Hindu nation of that age. Although Krishna was so divinely powerful, yet he was so meek, gentle, and humble that at the great inaugural ceremony of Emperor Yudhisthira, he voluntarily took the task of washing the feet of all the guests.

It is said that Krishna fulfilled the earnest prayers of Draupadi by miraculously feeding the multitude with a small quantity of food as well as by saving her from insult and ignominious treatment in the hands of the Kauravas.

Again, Krishna was appointed as the peace-maker, to stop the civil war that had been brewing for sometime between the Kauravas and Pândavas. The speech which he delivered before the court of Dhritarâstra, proves that Krishna was the greatest statesman of that time. In that famous address, he said to Duryodhana, the chief of the Kauravas. Make peace, prince of the Bharata race, with the wise, brave and energetic Pândavas, great in learning and self-subjugation. From peace would proceed happiness to kinsmen and friends, aye my dear, to the whole world * * The man who having heard the advice of his friends followeth it not, is tormented in the end," etc.

Those who have read the Mahâbhârata, the history of ancient India (which is called the greatest book in the world), will remember that during the battle of Kurukshetra, Krishna appeared in the battle field, not as a warrior, but as a charioteer, to advise his friend and disciple, Arjuna. He did not hold a weapon against warriors, but stood like the divine witness of the battle, which lasted for eighteen days. By this act, Krishna proved before the world that he did not believe in war ; that he did not encourage fighting and quarrels among any classes of people whether rulers or the ruled, that he was a peacemaker, and that he stood for justice and righteousness ; but his policy was to defend the oppressed against the oppressor. It was for this defence of justice as well as for the protection of the weak that he was obliged to hold arms against anybody.

On the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra, Krishna immortalized himself as an incarnation of the Lord and as the greatest of spiritual philosophers, by singing the celestial song of the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, which has been translated into every language of the civilized world.

In the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gîtâ*, Krishna says to Arjuna :

“Hear again, O thou of mighty arms, my word supreme, which wishing thy welfare, I shall speak to thee as thou delightest to hear. (1)

“Neither the hosts of gods nor the great seers

know my origin ; for I am the source of all the gods and the great saints. (2)

“He who knows me as birthless and beginningless, as the supreme Lord of the worlds is undeluded among mortals, and is emancipated from all sins. (3)

“Intelligence and wisdom, absence of delusion, forgiveness and truth, self-control and subjugation of the mind, pleasure and pain, birth and destruction, fear and fearlessness, feelings of non-killing and of sameness, contentment, austerity, munificence, fame and shame—from Me alone arise these different kinds of disposition. (4, 5)

“The seven great Rishis, the four sons of the Creator and the Manu, or the first man of each evolutionary cycle, were all born of my mind, and endued with my essence—from whom have descended all these creatures of the world. (6)

“He who knows in truth this glory and divine power of mine, is endued with unshaken realization ; there is no doubt in this. (7)

“I am the origin of all, and everything evolves from me—knowing this, the wise worship Me with love.”¹ (8)

Again in the eleventh chapter, it is said that Arjuna, after seeing the wonderful transfiguration of Krishna, declared :

“I see the gods in Thy body, O God, and all the multitudes of varied beings. (15)

1. Vide the Sanskrit references in the Appendix I.

"I see Thee with infinite forms all around, but cannot find the beginning, middle or end of Thy universal form. (16)

"Thou art the imperishable, the supreme object of knowledge, the great abode of the universe. Thou art the unchangeable protector of the eternal religion, and I know that Thou art the everlasting spirit. (18)

Without beginning, middle or end, with infinite power, with endless arms, with the sun and moon as Thine eyes, and the blazing fire as Thy mouth, I see Thee scorching the worlds with Thy radiance. (19)

"The space between the heaven and the earth and all the quarters are pervaded by Thee alone. Having seen Thy marvellous and awful form the three worlds are trembling."² (20)

Every word of this description bears testimony to the fact that Krishna was the incarnation of Divinity in a human form.

As, on the one hand, Krishna was the greatest of the political heroes, a king-maker, and the founder of the city of Dwârkâ and has been recognized by all as the ideal statesman, so, on the other hand, he was the greatest of the spiritual heroes that India has produced. All the wise men of India of all ages have paid allegiance to Lord Krishna, and have accepted him as their spiritual leader and as the saviour of mankind.

2. Vide the Sanskrit references in the Appendix I.

The teachings of Krishna resemble those of Jesus the Christ, and constitute the teachings of Vedânta.

The reader may compare the following quotations from the twelfth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gitâ* with the teachings of Christ :

“He who hates no creature, but is kind and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment, and egoism, equanimous in pleasure and pain, forgiving, contented, meditative, self-restrained and firm in faith, whose heart and soul are directed to Me, is dear to Me. (13, 14)

“He with whom the world is not annoyed and who is not annoyed by the world, who is free from self-esteem, envy, fear, and anxiety, is dear to Me. (15)

“He who is free from leanings, pure, vigorous, above all temporal affections, free from worldly agitations, who has abandoned all Passionate endeavours, is dear to Me. (16)

“He who neither rejoices nor hates, neither grieves nor desires, who has renounced merit and demerit, and is full of devotion and love, is dear to Me. (17)

“He who is the same towards friend and foe, in honour and dishonour, in heat and cold, in pleasure and pain, free from attachment, with whom censure and praise are alike, who is taciturn, content with any condition, homeless and steady-minded, is dear to Me. (18, 19)

“They, who follow this eternal law as spoken

above, endued with faith and regarding ME as the highest goal and devoted, are exceedingly dear to Me.”⁸ (20)

The teachers of the dualistic, qualified non-dualistic, and monistic Vedânta like Madhvâchârya and Chaitanya, Râmânûja and Sankarâchârya, and others unanimously hold Krishna as the ideal spiritual leader and the perfect incarnation of Divinity on earth.

In the life of this saviour, there is to be remarked a most wonderful combination of divine and human qualities. He possessed all divine powers, and showed by his actions that all noble human qualities reached perfection in him. Nowhere do we find another example of perfect embodiment of all the moral, spiritual and godly attributes which were manifested in the character of Krishna. All the wise philosophers of the East have paid homage to him for his supreme wisdom, and all the religious leaders of India down to the present day, have regarded him as the ideal master, the ideal hero, the incarnation of God and the greatest of all the spiritual manifestations of the world. Although the people of India believe that there have been many Avatâras or incarnations of the Lord, yet, in fact, God incarnates Himself, whenever and wherever there is the decline of virtue and uprise of unrighteousness, and still Krishna is worshipped by the Hindus of all castes and creeds as the greatest

3. Vide the Sanskrit references in the Appendix I.

of the saviours. No other incarnation, neither Buddha nor Christ, can take the place of Krishna, because neither of them could harmonize God and the world, and neither of them could set as high an example in social, political, ethical and spiritual ideals as was done by this world-redeemer.

In his early life, Krishna showed to his playmates that he was the embodiment of divine love. In his youth, he showed that he was the personification of heroism, patriotism, justice, and righteousness ; and in his maturity he married a beautiful girl to set before the world's eye the ideal of a perfect householder ; but yet his non-attachment to earthly relations was so great that he witnessed the destruction of his own royal race before he passed away, because his relatives and kinsmen deviated from the path of virtue. Through all the acts of his life, whether in politics, war, or in the duties of a householder, he emphasized and proved the truth of the grand ethical law : "Wherever there is virtue, there is victory and glorious life both in this world and hereafter ; and wherever there is vice, unrighteousness, injustice, and immorality, there is destruction physically, morally and spiritually."⁴

As a spiritual teacher, Krishna practised and advocated the life of renunciation. For many years he himself lived a pure, chaste and austere life of a Sannyâsin, who is absolutely free from worldly ties, and it is for this reason that he has become the ideal

4. Vide the Sanskrit reference in the Appendix I.

of the Sannyâsins or Hindu monks who have broken the chains of attachment and worldliness.

The students of the *Bhagavad Gitâ* know that Krishna established the Fatherhood of one omnipotent personal God, taught peace, charity, and love for human beings as also for lower animals, kindness to all, unselfish and disinterested work for the good of humanity, and faith in the inexhaustible goodness of the supreme Lord of the universe. He forbade revenge, and taught his disciples to return good for evil and love for hatred. He preached the immortality of the soul and the reward and punishment for our own thoughts and deeds by the law of karma, and emphasized the truth that individual souls are eternal, and that each soul will reach salvation and perfection in the end. His religion was the religion of love and devotion. It is said that His lofty precepts and the purity of his life spread his name throughout all India and finally won for him, more than three million followers.

For the first time in the religious history of the world was preached by Krishna universal toleration for all sects and creeds, and it was he who declared : "Whosoever comes to Me through whatsoever religion, I reach him. All men are struggling in the paths which ultimately lead to Me."⁵ He inculcated that all religions are like so many paths which in the end lead the individual souls to one goal of absolute truth and happiness. Thus he sounded

5. Vide the Sanskrit reference in the Appendix I.

the death-knell of religious bigotry and persecution among various sects. It was for this reason that, since his time, there has been no religious persecution in the history of India.

Thus after establishing his spiritual kingdom on earth and fulfilling his divine mission, Krishna wished to depart from this world of imperfection. When the exact time of his ascension to Heaven arrived, he forbade his disciples to follow him, and went alone to the forest on the top of a hill at Prabhâsa near Dwârakâ. There he reclined against the trunk of a tree, crossing his bare feet and withdrawing his mind from the world of senses, entered into deep *samâdhi* and communed with the infinite. While he was reposing in this Yoga posture, his feet were shot through with the arrow of an unknown barbarian hunter. When the hunter came nearer, thinking that it was a deer that he had shot, he discovered that his victim was Lord Krishna himself. Overcome by grief at the sight of his inhuman deed, he fell at his wounded feet, kissed them, and bathed them with tears of repentance. He begged pardon for his sin and forgiveness for his brutal crime ; but the saviour of sinners smiled, and blessed him saying : "Thou hast fulfilled the prophecy of the old sage, and I forgive thy sins ; thou shalt go to Heaven." Krishna went into *samâdhi* again and remained motionless. His disciples and followers, hearing of this heartrending event, came to see him, and when they were mourning and weeping bitterly,

he comforted them by giving them his last instructions and blessings ; and promising that he would come again, he passed out of his body and ascended to the heavens in the presence of men and gods. Thus ended the glorious career of this wonderful saviour of ancient India.

Shall we wonder why the Hindus of today worship and honour the name of Krishna, and why he has been upheld as the highest Ideal of the nation, during the last 3,000 years ? No other incarnation of Divinity appeals to the minds of the Hindus so strongly as this sin-atoning saviour of mankind. As he has been the national ideal in the past, so will he remain in time to come. Every Hindu believes in the second coming of Krishna at the close of the present cycle and realizes that whosoever worship him attains to salvation and eternal happiness. Krishna himself promised this in the *Bhagavad Gitâ* : "Giving up all the formalities of religion, come unto Me, follow Me, take refuge with Me. I shall make thee free from sins and shall give thee eternal life ; grieve not."⁶

6. Vide the Sanskrit reference in the Appendix I.

ZOROASTER AND HIS TEACHINGS

All the great religions of the world, Judaism, with its two offspring, Christianity and Mohammedanism, Brâhminism, with its offspring, Buddhism and Lamaism, and Zoroastrianism, had their origin in Asia, the home of all religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism arose among the various branches of the Semitic race, while Buddhism, Lamaism, and Zoroastrianism have been the religions of the Aryan race. It is the unanimous opinion of the great Oriental scholars of today that in prehistoric ages, the forefathers of the Aryan peoples lived together in Central Asia, before they branched off and migrated to different parts of the world ; that they spoke one language, more primitive than ancient Sanskrit or Zend, the mother of all existing Aryan languages of Asia and Europe, believed in a common religion, and had one form of worship. The descendants of one branch moved northwest ward, and migrated to five different parts of Europe. It is believed that the Celts originally belonged to the Aryan race, and they settled in the extreme west of Europe, in France, Great Britain, Ireland, and Belgium ; that they belonged to the robust Teutons in the South.

Northern and Central Europe, and the Slavs in

the Eastern parts (Russia and other places), and formed the Italian and Greek peoples in the South.

The other branch of the Aryan family settled in the Southern part of Asia between the rivers Indus and Euphrates, and were known at that time by name of Indo Iranians. A religious schism then divided the Indo-Iranians into two branches, which gradually became separated under the names of Indo-Aryans or Hindu-Aryans or the Hindus, who settled in the Northwestern part of India and the Irano-Aryans or Iranians who settled in Iran, of ancient Persia. The belief, worship, and religion of the Hindu-Aryans have been handed down to us in the form of the Rigveda, the most ancient scripture of the world. There we find that these ancient Hindu-Aryans were monotheistic, worshipping one God under the name of 'Asura-Varuna.' 'Asura' means 'living,' and 'Varuna' (Greek, 'Ouranos'), the 'Lord of the universe.' Although they believed in minor gods or *devas* (bright spirits), yet Varuna was the God of all gods. The same Asura-Varuna was worshipped by the Iranians as Ahura-Mazda. After the religious schism, the *devas* or good spirits of the Vedic period were called *daevas* (evil spirits or demons) by the Iranians. The cause of that schism was perhaps that the Iranians gave up the worship of Ahura Mazda (the supreme Lord of the universe), and took to the worship of those who are described in the Vedic scriptures as demons or evil spirits, and that they began to



Zoroaster
Old Master

practise black magic, sorcery, witchcraft, and gradually became immoral and unrighteous. Thus relinquishing the early race ideals and separating themselves from the Hindu-Aryans, the Iranians became more and more degenerate and immersed in a sea of ignorance, superstition, demon-worship, witchcraft, sorcery, immorality, vice, and unrighteousness, while the Hindu-Aryans retained their spiritual ideals, as we find in the Vedic writings. They developed six systems of philosophy and the monistic religion of Vedanta. which is so beautifully described in the ancient *Upanishads*.

The greatest prophet among these ancient Iranians was Zoroaster, who manifested in order to re-establish true religion and the worship of Ahura Mazda, the supreme Lord of the universe. Zoroaster was preceded by three great Iranian saints, Vivanghant, Athwya and Thritha, as Moses was preceded by three great Jewish sages, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is said that long before the advent of Zoroaster, King Yim of Iran, foresaw in a vision the perfect image of the coming sage, and prophesied the defeat and absolute overthrow of the demons at the birth of the glorious prophet. Many other prophecies are given in the Avestic writings, which existed centuries before the coming of the great saviour of Iran. Some people think that Zoroaster was not a historic personage, just as there are many today who believe that Shakespeare never lived, that the life of Napoleon was a myth, and

that Christ Buddha, and Krishna were not historic figures, but the majority of the Oriental scholars are of the opinion that the prophet of Iran was absolutely historical.¹

Although there is among them a dispute, regarding the exact date and place of birth, and some say that Zoroaster lived about 6000 B. C., others maintain that he was born in Bactria about 12000 B. C., yet the actual historical time cannot be earlier than the middle of the seventh century B. C. The prophet of Iran was a direct descendant of the royal line of the house of Mânushcar, the ancient sovereign of Iran. His father's name was Porushaspa, and his mother was known as Dughdhova. Tradition says that he arose in the West of Iran, and that his native place was the district of Atropatene or Adarbaijan in the neighbourhood of Lake Urumiah.

The story of the birth of this great prophet is as miraculous as the stories of the births of other great saviours of the world. It is said that the glory of Ahura Mazda descended from heaven and entered into the house where dwelt the future mother of the prophet, and remained with her, until she was fifteen years of age. At this time, her father, being

1. Prof. A. V. W. Jackson says: "It is the more interesting to know something about the life and character of this Persian law-giver and philosopher of old, this religious teacher of ancient Iran, because much has been added in the last few years to our knowledge of Zoroaster as a historical personage."—*Persia, Past—and Present*, P. 57.

under the influence of evil spirits, was convinced that she was bewitched by some demon, and so sent her away to the district of the Spitamas. There, guided by the holy spirits and archangels, Dughdhova married Pourushaspa of the Spitama family, and became the mother of the prophet of Iran. Various miracles are described regarding the time when the conception took place, and they are of a similar nature to those of Christ, Buddha, and Krishna. It is said that Dughdhova saw archangels coming to her, worshipping and praising the unborn child. The birth of Zoroaster, like the birth of all saviours of the world, was of a virgin mother, was heralded by a star, and many other spiritual signs and omens and accompanied by the most wonderful events. The scriptures of the Zoroastrians recount that at the time of the birth of the saviour of Iran, all nature rejoiced, even the trees, rivers, and cattle expressed joy and gladness, and that the evil spirits were frightened and took flight into the depths of the earth. It is also said that his birth was a perfect fulfilment of the prayers of the holy father, Pourushaspa to Haoma (the same as the Vedic *Soma*). Thus amidst the rejoicings of nature and miraculous signs, the great messenger of Ahura Mazda was ushered into this world about the year 660 B. C. to fulfil the Divine mission. Well has it been said by Professor Jackson : "Messiah-like he appears, and the land of Iran rings with his clarion note of reform. He is born as one out of the fulness

of time.”² Tradition says that at the time of his birth he showed wonderful signs of wisdom and Divine powers. Instead of crying like the child of an ordinary mortal, the young prophet immediately burst forth into loud laughter, and his little brain began to throb so violently that no one could lay his hand upon the infant’s head. The parents rejoiced at the sight of these marvellous events, and many angels and archangels were seen coming to worship him. They gave him the name of ‘Spitama Zarathustra’, meaning ‘Righteous’ in Iranian language. ‘Spitama’ was the family designation, and ‘Zarathustra’ was his name. There are different ways, in which this name has been spelled and pronounced. Some spell it ‘Zarathustra’, others ‘Zartust’, ‘Zardusht’, ‘Zarduhasht’, and so on. There are various meanings given by the scholars to this name, which are more or less imaginary ; but now it is believed that ‘Zarathustra’ is a Sanskrit compound word, ‘Zarad’ and ‘Ushtra’ ; ‘Zara’, or ‘Zarad’ means ‘old’, and ‘Ushtra’, means ‘camel’—‘an old camel’, or ‘one whose camels are old’, a very prosaic name indeed ! The Greeks called him Zoroaster for the first time, but he was known in Iran, and in the ancient Zend writings of the Parsees as Zarathustra.

From the moment of the saviour’s advent, demons and wicked spirits intrigued against him to take his life, and the Turanian King, Durasrobo, the

2. Cf. *Persia, Past and Present*, P, 59.

chief of the demon-worshippers was the Herod of that time. This wicked king made various attempts to destroy the young child, and sent all the demoniac spirits to kill him ; but by divine providence the life of the young saviour was miraculously preserved, and the machinations of the king were frustrated.

We know very little of the early life of the prophet of Iran, excepting these miracles. In his seventh year, he was placed by his father, Pourushaspa, under the care and instruction of a wise man, name Burzin Kurus. The Syriac and Arabic reports say that Zarathustra was a pupil of the prophet Jeremiah, and that he studied with him, and when he proved treacherous, he was cursed by Yahveh with the affliction of leprosy. At this age, however, Zarathustra showed his great wisdom in argument with the wise men—he rebuked the heretics, and put them to confusion, in the same manner as the Christ did, when he was twelve years old.

At the age of fifteen he took religious vows, by assuming the '*Kusti*', or the sacred thread and the religious girdle, as did the Brâhmîns in India upon entering a student's life. Like the high-caste Hindus, the Iranians, or the Parsees, still wear their sacred thread. At this time Zarathustra despised all earthly desires, and cared nothing for worldly pleasures. His soul was soaring high above the attractions of the senses. He searched not for the

enjoyments of earthly life, and had great love and compassion, not only for all humanity, but also for all living creatures. The sight of misery and misfortunes of humanity touched his great soul, and even the sufferings of a starving dog, it is said, stirred the all-loving soul of the great saviour of Iran.

Reaching the age of twenty, he left his parents' house, and wandered from place to place, living the life of purity and righteousness. For ten years he travelled in the forests and desert places, and lived alone in caves and on mountain-tops, eating nothing but cheese and milk. In the silence of his forest-retreat, he succeeded in conquering his physical body and in bringing his senses into absolute subjugation. He spent most of his time in religious preparation, reflection and mediation. His spiritual eye gradually opened, and he was ready to see prophetic visions. In the stillness of the lonely desert, his soul, transcending the attractions of the world of senses, rose high and entered into the ecstatic rapture of *samadhi*, communion with the supreme Being, Ahura Mazda, the Lord of the universe. As the great prophet of Judaism communed with Yahveh upon the summit of Mount Sinai, so did Zarathustra with Ahura Mazda, on the top of Mount Sabatan, the Iranian Mount Sinai. During this time, he received spiritual visions and wisdom from the Lord, for he was following the path of the ancient Magi. Herodotus tells us that the ancient

Magi always used to worship on the tops of high mountains. We should remember that the word 'Magi' was used for the ancient Median tribe of priests who lived in Persia long before the time of Zarathustra and he himself was often called the 'Magian prophet', 'The head of the Magians', because he supported the wisdom and learning of the ancient masters.

Thus, after spending ten long years in preparing himself for spiritual realization, the prophet of Iran received in his thirtieth year, the Divine Light of revelation, and became the world-renowned messenger of Ahura Mazda. The first Divine revelation came to him on the banks of the Dâiti River (the Jordan of Zoroastrianism), at dawn of the fifth day of May, of the thirty-first year of the reign of the Iranian King, Vishtasp. It is described in the Avestic writings that after crossing the river four times, as the prophet stood on the banks, he suddenly beheld, coming towards him from the south, the glorified celestial image of an archangel. It was Vohumanah, the archangel of good thought. Gradually that colossal figure, nine times the size of an ordinary man stood before him, radiant with celestial glory,³ and Zarathustra whose eyes were dazzled, fainted at this unexpected vision. The archangel then commanded him to lay aside the garment of his physical body, and directed his soul

3. It reminds one of the vision that appeared to Daniel on the River Hiddekel,

in *samâdhi* to the heavenly abode of Ahura Mazda and the Amshaspands, or archangels, the personified qualities and attributes of Ahura Mazda. After entering into the celestial abode, Zarathustra offered his homage to Ahura Mazda and His attendants, and took the seat of an enquirer. Then the supreme Lord Himself instructed the prophet in the cardinal doctrines of the faith, and imparted Divine wisdom to him,

It is said that this vision was repeated three times on the same day. Thus being initiated by the supreme Lord Himself Zarathustra became the saviour of Iran; and obeying the commands of Ahura Mazda he began to preach that great religion which was afterwards known as Zoroastrianism or Mazdasnayan or Mazda-worshipping religion. He tried at first to convert all demon-worshippers and evil men and women as well as their chiefs who are known in the Zend-Avesta as Kavis and Karaps. But his powers were not yet strong enough and he failed in his attempts. For two years he struggled hard to find the right soil wherein to sow the seed of his new religion, but he did not succeed. At this time Zarathustra, obeying the command of Ahura Mazda, visited a rich Karap, Vaedvoisht by name, and demanded one hundred youths, maidens and teams of four horses, as a gift for the Lord. But the prophet received an arrogant rebuff, and fled to the Lord for refuge. The Lord comforted him by assuring him that the offender would receive

eternal punishment after death. This reminds us of Elijah, who pronounced the doom of Ahaziah when he did not recognize the God of Israel.

Zarathustra travelled from place to place, and it is said that he went to India and to China, and that no one received his message. He became greatly discouraged, and did not know what to do, but again was comforted by Ahura Mazda, who said : "The time has not yet come, thou needest further revelations". Between the thirtieth and fortieth year of his age, Zarathustra had six more prophetic visions, and among these he held converse with six great archangels, who were the presiding lords of animals, fire, metals, earth, water and plants.

In the second vision, Vohumanah, the archangel of good thought, who was also presiding lord of domestic animals, such as cattle and horses, asked Zarathustra to take proper care of all these useful animals, and to protect them. In his third vision, Asha Vahishta, the archangel of perfect righteousness, who was the presiding lord of sacred and secular fires, enjoined upon the prophet the care and protection of all fires, sacred and secular. In his fourth ecstatic vision, he held converse with Khshathra Vairya, the archangel of good royalty, who presides over metals, and who assigned to him their care. Then in the next three visions, Zarathustra had conference with three other archangels : Spenta Armaiti, the archangel of pious modesty, ruling over earth ; Haurvatat, the

archangel of perfect health, ruler of waters, and and lastly, Ameretat, the archangel of immortality, who was also the presiding lord of plants.

These six ecstatic visions of paradise, following the first one on the banks of the Dâiti River, may be compared with the seven heavens of Mohammed. By their means Zarathustra became well acquainted with the celestial hierarchy of God, the angels, and archangels. During these ten years he received the whole of his spiritual revelations and the wisdom that is contained in the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Zend Avesta. He brought from heaven the highest knowledge of the supreme Lord, Ahura Mazda, as also the Ahuna Vairya, the paternoster of Zoroastrianism. As he was descending from the celestial abode, he was attacked on his way by the combined forces of evil that stood against him. Ahriman, the Satan of Zoroastrianism, intrigued to destroy him once more, and sent his chief attendant "Buiti", to tempt and overthrow the messenger of Ahura Mazda ; but he was defeated by the spiritual powers of Zarathustra.

The Zend Avesta says :

I. From the region of the north, from the regions of the north, forth rushed Angra Mainyu, the deadly, the Daeva of Daevas. And thus spake the evil-doer Angra-Mainyu, the deadly : 'Drug, rush down and kill him' ; O holy Zarathustra ! The Drug came rushing along, the demon Buiti, who is deceiving, unseen death.

"2 (5). Zarathustra chanted aloud the Ahuna Vairya : 'The will of the Lord is the law of righteousness. The gifts of the Vohu-Mano to the deeds done in the world for Mazda. He who relieves the poor makes Ahura King'.

"He offered the sacrifice to the good waters of the good Dâitaya ! He recited the profession of the worshippers of Mazda !

"The Drug dismayed, rushed away, the demon Buiti, who is deceiving, unseen death.

"3 (7). And the Drug said unto Angra-Mainyu : 'Thou tormentor, Angra Mainyu ! I see no way to kill Spitama Zarathustra, so great is the glory of the holy Zarathustra'.

"Zarathustra saw (all this) within his soul : 'The wicked, the evil-doing Daevas (thought he) take counsel together for my death'.

I(a)

"4 (11). Up started Zarathustra, forward went Zarathustra, unabated by Akem-mano, by the hardness of his malignant riddles ; he went swinging stones in his hand, stones as big as a house, which he obtained from the Maker, Ahura Mazda, he the holy Zarathustra.

'Whereat on this wide, round earth, whose ends lie afar, whereat dost thou swing bank of the river Darega in the mansion of Pourushaspa ?'

"5 (16). Thus Zarathustra answered Angra Mainyu : 'O evil-doer. Angra Mainyu ! I will

smite the creation of the Daeva ; I will smite the Nasu, a creature of the Daeva ; I will smite the Pairika Knâthaiti, till the victorious Saoshyant come up to life out of the lake Kasava, from the region of the dawn, from the regions of the dawn'.

"6 (20). Again to him said the maker of the evil world, Angra Mainyu : 'Do not destroy my creatures, O holy Zarathustra ! thou art the son of Pourushaspa ; by thy mother I was invoked. Renounce the good religion of the worshippers of Mazda, and thou shalt gain such a boon as Vadhaghna gained, the ruler of the nations'.

"7 (24). Spitama Zarathustra said in answer : 'No ! never will I renounce the good religion of the worshippers of Mazda either for body or life, though they should tear away the breath !'

"8 (27). Again to him said the maker of the evil world. Angra Mainyu : 'By whose word wilt thou strike, by whose weapon will the good creatures (strike and repel) my creation, who am Angra Mainyu ?'

"9 (29). Spitama Zarathustra said in answer : 'The Sacred mother, the sacred cups, the Haoma, the Word taught by Mazda, these are my weapons, my best weapons ! By this Word will I strike, by this Word will I repel, by this weapon will the good creatures (strike and repel thee). O evil-door, Angra Mainyu ! The good Spirit made the creation : he made it in the boundless time. The Ameska-

Spentas made the creation the good, the wise sovereigns'.

"10 (35). Zarathustra chanted aloud the Ahuna Vairya. The holy Zarathustra said aloud : 'This I ask thee : teach me the truth, O Lord !'"⁴

Thus conquering Ahriman, the prophet of Iran became the master of all demons and began to preach again. However, after ten years of struggle and spiritual activity, he made only one convert to his faith, and that was his own cousin, Metyomah, who remained until his last moment as faithful as St. John the disciple. The triumph of his faith was not achieved until two years later, when he converted Vishtasp or Gushtasp, the reigning monarch of Iran. For two years he had to struggle vigorously, and perform many miracles before he could convince this great king. The learned priests of the court of Vishtasp intrigued against him, accusing him before the king of being a sorcerer ; they also persuaded their sovereign to throw the prophet into a dungeon to die of starvation. It is said that Zarathustra remained in prison for some time, but protected by divine Providence, and directed by the archangels, he miraculously restored to health the King's favourite black horse, whose four legs had been suddenly drawn up under his belly, so that he could not move. When this miracle was performed, King Vishtasp became convinced of his supernatural powers and falling at his feet, worshipped him as the

4. Cf. *Vendidad-Fargard* XIX, pp. 209-212.

prophet of Iran. The prophet restored the four legs of the horse on four conditions: First, that Vishtasp should accept the new faith; secondly, that he should give his own warlike son, Isfendiar, to fight in support of this religion; thirdly, that the queen should be converted; and lastly, that the king should reveal the names of all those who had plotted against him. The King's counter-requests were also four in number: First, that he might know his final doom, and his place in paradise; secondly, that his body might become invulnerable; thirdly, that he might have universal knowledge; and lastly, that his soul might not leave his body until the resurrection. Three archangels appeared, and, with their celestial grandeur, brightness and majesty, dazzled the eyes of the monarch, his queen, the members of the royal family and of the court. As the archangels proceeded to the palace of Vishtasp, their radiance seemed to him like a heaven of complete light. The king trembled at the sight, and all his chieftains were confused. A voice spoke out from the light, that they had come at the bidding of the Lord to show him the glory of the religion of Zardust. King Vishtasp was convinced. He accepted the creed, and had a glimpse of paradise. The archangel Ashavashisto gave him a drink of the fountain of life. Seeing the wonderful sight, queen Hutaosa and the brother of the king were also convinced, and all of them became devoted followers of

Zoroastrianism. The struggling creed now found a royal patron and protector in Vishtasp, who became the defender of the faith, and may be called the Constantine of this religion.

It is said, that in order to commemorate the conversion of King Vishtasp, Zarathustra planted a cypress tree in front of the great fire-temple at Kishmar. Soon the tree grew very large, spreading its branches over an immense area. It was believed that this was a sign that the new faith would advance rapidly under the fostering care of the royal patronage. From now on the gospel of Zoroaster, protected by sovereign power, continued to spread throughout the country. It was no longer confined to the small family of the reigning monarch, but all the subjects and attendants of the King, the people of Iran, and of the other provinces of Persia embraced the new religion.

Tradition says that Zarathustra defeated all the great philosophers and prophets of India, Babylon and Greece. There are stories in the Persian scriptures regarding the conversion of Sankaracharya, the great commentator of the Vedanta philosophy, who lived in the seventh century A. D. In the same manner it is narrated that Vyasa, the renowned author of the epic Mahabharata as well as of the Vedantasutras (aphorisms), who lived about 1400 B. C., was converted by Zarathustra. The Avesta also tries to make Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, his disciple. But all these stories were

afterwards added to the Avestic writings, and did not exist at that time. Historically speaking, Vyasa, Buddha and Sankaracharya could not be cotemporaries of Zarathustra. Similarly the Avesta attempts to prove that some of the ancient Greek philosophers, like Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle, also became the disciples of the prophet.

The religion of Zarathustra spread very rapidly among the Jews (especially the Pharisees) in Babylon during the Babylonian Captivity. There is a tradition that he himself went to Babylon and converted thousands to his faith, but there is no authentic proof that he did so. The Avesta relates that king Vishtasp, who was a very zealous supporter of the creed, vigorously started a crusade on behalf of the true religion against its enemies and all demonworshippers. It is also said that Vishtasp was married twice, and that he had a large family by his second wife, who was a patroness of the prophet. He had eighteen sons and two daughters, all of whom embraced Zoroastrianism. The King's brother, Zairi Bairi, who was a great hero, became a staunch follower of this religion. Tradition says that Zarathustra himself married three times, and had many children. By his first wife he had one son and three daughters ; the youngest daughter, whose name was Pourucista, married Jamaspa, the wise councillor and chancellor of the King, and brother to Frashostras, the vizir and attendant upon Vishtasp's throne. By his second wife, the prophet

had two sons. Frashostra, the vizir, became so devoted to Zarathustra that he gave his daughter to him to be his wife. This wife, Hvovi, bore no earthly child, but is described as the noble consort of whom will be born three great millennial prophets of Zoroastrianism, Ukshyat-Eteta, Ukshyat-Nemath and the Messiath, Saoshyant. The Messiah will come on the last day of judgment, when this world of evil will be destroyed, and a new one will be created by Ahurā Mazdā. He will then overcome and destroy the powers of evil.

The Avesta says ; "He (Saoshyant) shall restore the world, which will (thenceforth) never grow old and never die, never decaying and never rotting ever living and ever increassing, and master of the wish, when the dead will rise, when life and immortality will come, and the world will be restored at its wish" (Zamyad Yast, 89). This was the beginning of the conception of a spiritual Messiah in the Zoroastrian faith.

Fifteen years elapsed between the conversion of King Vishtasp and the holy wars against his inveterate foe and mortal enemy Arjasp, the Turanian King, whom later history describes as the infidel Turk. During this period Zarathustra preached the gospel, and performed many miracles, took proper care of fires, cattle and metals ; healed the sick, restored the sight of a blind man ; established many fire-temples and spread his reform over all the country ; exercised his powers in

suppressing demon-worship, witchcraft, and sorcery ; drove pestilence from the land, and succeeded in overcoming all national calamities and disasters. During this time, he himself acted as the chief priest of his own religion. There existed in Iran ten principal places of fire worship before the time of the prophet and there were three kinds of fires for the three classes of people, according to their social position . the fire for the noble classes, or the priests, which was the oldest, and was called the 'fire of the divine glory', which still exists among Zoroastrian priests in India. This was the most sacred of the holy fires of Iran, There was also a separate fire for the warrior classes and another for labouring classes. These three classes among the Iranians were like the three castes among the Hindu people of ancient India.

At the end of fifteen years the history of Zarathustra's religion began a new chapter by declaring, in 601 B. C., holy wars, crusades, fights and bloodshed, which the prophet thought necessary for the spread of his faith, and which continued till 583 B. C. During this period the war cry of the true faith against unbelief filled the air of Iran, as it did later in Arabia, when Mohammed preached his new religion and was opposed by the unbelievers. The Avesta describes in glowing terms the minute details of this holy warfare, and mentions some eight powerful enemies who were vanquished by King Vishtasp and his gallant brother Zarir

(Xarivairi). It also relates how at the invocation of the king and his brother for divine aid, Ahura Mazda sent victory upon their banners and thus fulfilled the prayers of His devotees.

The great holy war was against the Turanian King, Arjasp. It is said that King Arjasp, being inspired by the evil designs of Ahriman, and guided and directed by him, issued an ultimatum to the effect that King Vishtasp must abandon the new creed, or be prepared to have his country invaded within two months. Hearing this ultimatum, Vishtasp was very angry, but being unwilling to give up his faith, to which he was devoted with his whole heart and soul, he declared a holy war against Arjasp. The Turanian King invaded the country with an army of 3000.000 men, and fought two battles within two weeks against 144,000 chosen men of Iran under the command of King Vishtasp and his heroic brother Zarir.

Yatkari Zariran says: "As the battle opened the dashing leader Zarir began the fight as fiercely as when the good of Fire burst into a hayrick and is impelled onward by a blast of the storm. Each time, as he struck his sword down, he killed ten Khyons; and as he drew it back, he slew eleven. When hungry and thirsty, he needed only to look upon the blood of the Khyons, and he became refreshed".

But Zarir was treacherously slain by a poisoned spear, hurled from behind by a magician, Vidrasfsh,

who was promised the fair hand of Arjasp's daughter as a reward. After the death of Zarir, his young son, who was like a giant in strength took the lead, killed Vidrasfsh the traitor, routed the enemies, defeated Arjasp, and compelled him to retreat in humiliation to his own land.

Vishtash marched back to the city of Balkh, the capital of Iran, and celebrated the Victory by honouring the young hero, Bastvar and his own valiant son, Isfendiar. He sent Bastvar, the son of Zarir, at the head of an army of 100,000 picked men to Kallakh, the capital of Arjasp's country, in order to complete the conquest. Thus ended the first holy war.

King Vishtasp, the defender of the Faith of Zoroaster, then started crusades against unbelievers in foreign lands, and deputed his two sons upon the hallowed mission of converting all nations to the new religion- It is said that their efforts were divinely crowned with success.

Nearly eighteen years after his defeat the Turanian king Arjasp again invaded the country of Iran and the second holy war began. In this war Arjasp successfully stormed the capital of Iran, sacked the city, destroyed the holy temples, and massacred the priests, while they were engaged in their devotional exercises.

Shah Namah gives a graphic description of the final scene which closed the glorious career of the prophet of Iran : "The army (of Turan) thereupon

entered Balkh and the word became darkened with rapine and murder. They advanced towards the Temple of Fire (Ataskadah) and to the palace and glorious hall of gold, They burned the Zend Avesta entire and they set fire to the edifice and the palace alike. There (in the sanctuary) were eighty priests, whose tongues ceased not to repeat the name of God ; all these they slew in the very presence of the Fire, and put an end to their life of devotion, By the blood of these was extinguished the Fire of Zardusht". It is also said that the fanatical invaders at last entered the temple of Nush-Adar, where the prophet of Iran stood before the holy altar in his oratory, holding a rosary in his hand and praying to the Lord. A Turk, Turbaratur by a name, attacked the prophet with his sword, and crushed the head of the Divine master. Tradition says that Zarathustra threw his rosary at his enemy and that the fire proceeding from it fell on Turbaratur and consumed him on the spot. Thus Zarathustra received his martyrdom at the age of seventy-seven, on the day of Khur in the month of Atravahishto, on the eleventh day of the second month of the Zoroastrian year'.⁵

There are many legendary accounts in Greek and Latin literature of Zarathustra's death by lightning or a flame from heaven, but the Iranian tradition says that he met a violent death as descri-

Of. Prof. A. V. W. Jacksons this date of Zoroaster's death as May 1st, 583 B. C

bed above. Thus the great messenger of Ahura Mazda and the founder of the religion of Mazda-worship passed away at the zenith of his glory, leaving hundreds of sincere followers, who continued the propaganda of the faith with fanatical zeal and enthusiasm.

The holy war ended at the defeat of Arjasp by Vishtasp's son, who drove him out of Iran, and pursuing his vanquished enemy into his own capital in Turan, massacred the people and destroyed the power of Ahriman by slaying the wicked King.

After the death of Zarathustra his prophetic mantle as the chief priest of the faith fell upon his son-in-law, Jamaspa, who became his successor in the pontifical office of Iran. It was he who wrote down the teachings of the prophet, which are called the Avesta and Zend, the scriptures of the Zoroastrians. Frashaoshtra, the father-in-law of Zarathustra became the first apostle of this creed and lived for many years expounding the doctrines of the Faith.

Zoroastrianism did not die at the death of its founder, but began to spread rapidly, for the seed of this religion, like that of many others, was the blood of the martyrs slain. Within a short time it became the state religion of Persia, and remained such untill the wave of Mohammedanism swept over Persia, and destroyed by fire and sword its glorious monuments. Persia is now a Mohammedan country, and few Zoroastrians are to be found there. They were persecuted and driven out of that land,

and were obliged to take refuge in India, where religious toleration has always been the ideal of the Hindu nation. Here under the protection of the Hindu monarchs, Zoroastrians have been allowed to follow their Faith to practise their religious rites and ceremonies and to live peacefully in the heart of Hindu communities. They are known as Parsees. The principal place of their worship is the great fire-temple in Bombay. Today the Parsee population in India is less than one hundred thousand.

Although Zoroastrianism suffered great loss from foreign invaders like the Greeks, Romans, Mohammedans, it still has left indelible impression upon the religious creeds of Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism. During the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews received for the first time the ideas of heaven and hell, of angels and archangels, of a spiritual Messiah, and of the resurrection and the last Day of Judgment. These have given foundation to the doctrines of Christianity, and Mohammedanism as well.

People have an erroneous idea that Zarathustra's religion was fire-worship. Fire was a sacred symbol in the Avesta, and was regarded as the son of Ahura Mazda, but it is not described as God, nor to be worshipped. He did not teach the worship of fire, but the worship of the one supreme Lord of the universe, under the name of Ahura Mazda. Fire was only the sacred object, the symbol of the

Divine, as it was in ancient sacrifices. Zarathustra preached for the first time that all that is good and beneficial to mankind is the creation of Ahura Mazda ; and everything that is evil or malignant, is the creation of the evil spirit Ahriman or Satan, (the Devil in Christianity). This good God or the Spirit of light and brightness, is constantly opposed to the evil spirit or the spirit of darkness. At first Ahriman was one of the angels of Ahura Mazda, against whom he rebelled. Being driven out of heaven by the Lord, Ahriman became His constant adversary. It was Ahriman, who brought evil into this world to destroy the good creation of Ahura Mazda ; and this fight between good and evil will continue untill the last Day of Judgement when the world will be renovated, and the triumph of good over evil will be the final result.

Zarathustra believed in heaven and hell, and said that all those who perform good deeds, hold good thoughts, and use good words will go to heaven, and attain to immortal life ; while evil thoughts, evil deeds, and evil words lead the sinner to eternal hell. There is a paradise of good deeds and a paradise of good thoughts and of good words. At the dawn of the fourth day after death, each soul is resurrected ; the souls of the virtuous go to the paradise of good thoughts, good deeds and good words and eventually enter into the abode of Ahura Mazda, receive the golden throne, and enjoy celestial bliss ; while the souls of the wicked suffer in endless darkness

after resurrection. This is the universal law for all men and women.

We read in the Zend-Avesta, Yast XXII :

1.

"1. Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazda : 'O Ahura Mazda, most beneficent Spirit, Maker of the material world, thou Holy One !

"When one of the faithful departs this life. where does his soul abide on that night ?"

"Ahura Mazda answered" :

'2. 'It takes its seat near the head singing the *Ushtavaiti Gāthā* and proclaiming happiness : "Happy is he, happy the man, whoever he be, to whom Ahura Mazda gives the full accomplishment of his wishes !" On that night his soul tastes as much of pleasure as the whole of the living world can taste.'

"3. —'On the second night where does his soul abide ?'

"4. Ahura Mazda answered ; 'It takes its seat near the head singing the *Ushtavaiti Gāthā* and proclaiming happiness : "Happy is he, happy the man, whoever he be, to whom Ahura Mazda gives the full accomplishment of his wishes !" On that night his soul tastes as much of pleasure as the whole of the living world can taste,'

"5. —'On the third night where does his soul abide ?'

"6. Ahura Mazda answered ; 'It takes its seat near the head singing the *Ushtavaiti Gāthā* and

proclaiming happiness ; "Happy is he, happy the man, whoever he be, to whom Ahura Mazda gives the full accomplishment of his wishes !" On that night his soul tastes as much of pleasure as the whole of the living world can taste.'

"7. At the end of the third night, when the dawn appears, it seems to the soul of the faithful one as if it were brought amidst plants and scents : it seems as if a wind were blowing from the region of the South, from the regions of the South, a sweet-scented wind, sweeter-scented than any other wind in the world,

"8. And it seems to the soul of the faithful one as if he were inhaling that wind with the nostrils, and he thinks : 'Whence does that wind blow, the sweetest-scented wind I ever inhaled with my nostrils ?'

"9, And it seems to him as if his own conscience were advancing to him in that wind, in the shape of a maiden fair, bright, whitearmed. strong, tall-formed, high-standing. thick-breasted, beautiful of body, noble, of a glorious seed, of the size of a maid in her fifteenth year, as fair as the fairest things in the world.

"10. And the soul of the faithful one addressed her, asking : 'What maid art thou, who art the fairest maid I have ever seen ?'

"11, And she, being his own conscience answers him : 'O thou youth of good thoughts, good

words, and good deeds, of good religion, I am thy own conscience !'

" 'Everybody did love thee for that greatness, goodness, fairness, sweet-scentedness, victorious strength and freedom from sorrow in which thou dost appear to me,'

"12, And so thou, O youth of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, of good religion ! didst love me for that greatness, goodness, fairness, sweet-scentedness, victorious strength, and freedom from sorrow, in which I appear to thee.

"13. When thou wouldst see a man making derision, and deeds of idolatry, or rejecting (the poor) and shutting his door, then thou wouldst sit singing the *Oāthās* and worshipping the good waters and Atar, the son of Ahura Mazda, and rejoicing the faithful that would come from near or from afar,

"14, 'I was lovely and thou madest me still lovelier ; I was fair, and thou madest me still fairer I was desirable and thou madest me still more desirable ; I was sitting in a forward place and thou madest me sit in the foremost place, through this good thought, through this good speech, and through this-good deed of thine ; and so henceforth men worship me for my having long sacrificed unto and conversed with Ahura Mazda.

"15. 'The first step that the soul of the faithful man made, placed him in the Good Thought Paradise ;

"The second step that the soul of the faithful

man made, placed him in the Good-word Paradise ;

“ ‘The third step that the soul of the faithful man made, placed him in the Good-Deed Paradise ;

“ ‘The fourth step that the soul of the faithful man made, placed him in the Endless Lights.’

“16. Then one of the faithful, who had departed before him, asked him, saying : ‘How didst thou depart this life, thou holy man ? How didst thou come, thou holy man ! from the abodes full of cattle and full of the wishes and enjoyments of love ? From the material world into the world of the spirit ? From the decaying world into the undecaying one ?

‘How long did thy felicity last ?’

“17. And Ahura Mazda answered : ‘Ask him not what thou askest him, who has just gone the dreary way, full of fear and distress where the body and the soul part from one another.

“18. (Let him eat) of the food brought to him, of the oil of Zaremaya : this is the food for youth of good thoughts, good words, good deeds, of good religion, after he has departed this life. This is the food for the holy woman, rich in good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, well principled and obedient to her husband, after she has departed this life.’

II.

“19. Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazda : ‘O Ahura Mazda, most beneficent Spirit, Maker of the material world, thou Holy One !’

'When one of the wicked perishes, where does his soul abide on that night ?'

"20. Ahura Mazda answered : 'It rushes and sits near the skull singing the *Kima Gāthā*, O holy Zarathustra !'

"To what land shall I turn, O Ahura Mazda ? To whom shall I go with praying."

'On that night his soul tastes as much of suffering as the whole of the living world can taste.'

"21. —'On the second night, where does his soul abide ?'

"22. Ahura Mazda answered : 'It rushes and sits near the skull, singing the *Kima Gāthā*,' O holy Zarathustra : "To what land shall I turn," O Ahura Mazda ? To whom shall I go with praying ?"

'On that night his soul tastes as much of suffering as the whole of the living world can taste.'

23. —'On the third night where does his soul abide ?'

"24. Ahura Mazda answered. 'It rushes and sits near the skull, singing the *Kima Gāthā*,' O holy Zarathustra : "To what land shall I turn, O Ahura Mazda ?" To whom shall I go with praying ?"

'On that night his soul tastes as much of suffering as the whole of the living world can taste.'

25. At the end of the third night, O holy Zarathustra ! when the dawn appears, it seems to the soul of the faithful one, as if it were brought amidst snow and stench, and as if a wind were blowing from the region of the north, from the

regions of the north, a foul-scented wind, the foulest-scented of all the winds in the world.

26-32. And it seems to the soul of the wicked man, as if he were inhaling that wind with the nostrils, and he thinks ; 'Whence does that wind blow, the foulest-scented wind that I ever inhaled with my nostrils ?'

33. The first step that the soul of the wicked man made laid him in the Evil-Thought Hell ;

The second step that the soul of the wicked man made laid him in the Evil-World Hell ;

The third step that the soul of the wicked man made laid him in the Evil-Deed Hell ;

The fourth step that the soul of the wicked man made laid him in the Endless Darkness.

34. Then one of the wicked who departed before him addressed him, saying : 'How didst thou perish, O wicked man ? How didst thou come, O fiend ! from the abodes full of cattle and full of the wishes and enjoyments of love ? From the material world into the world of the Spirit ? From the decaying world into the undecaying one ? How long did thy suffering last ?'

35. Angra Mainyu, the lying one, said : 'Ask him not what thou askest him, who has just gone the dreary way, full of fear and distress, where the body and the soul part from one another.

36. 'Let him eat of the food brought unto him, of poison and poisonous stench ; this is the food, after he has perished, for the youth of evil thoughts,

evil words, evil deeds, evil religion after he has perished : this is the food for the fiendish woman rich in evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds, evil religion, ill-principled, and disobedient to her husband.'

In the Avestic writings, we find much similarity to the Vedic pantheon of the Hindus. For instance, Ahura Mazda is no other than Asura Varuna of the monotheistic Vedic worshippers of ancient India. Varuna was the *Curaus* of the Greeks. In the same manner it can be shown that the Zoroastrian Mithra (Greek Apollo) is the same as *Mithra*, the Sun God of the Vedas. The worship of Mithra has left great impression upon early Christianity. Again the *Soma* of the Vedas is described as Haoma in the Avesta. We also notice that the Vedic rain-god Indra has become the demon Andra. The *Yama* of the Vedas is the same as Yima of the Avesta. The Saurva of the Avesta is the same as *Sarva* or *Siva* of the Vedas. In short, the language of the Avesta is closely related to the ancient Sanskrit of the Rig Veda.

The Zoroastrian scriptures, which are called Zend Avesta contain three parts : The first, Vendidâd, a compilation of religious laws and mythical tales of ancient times ; the second, Visperad, a collection of litanies for sacrifices ; and the third, Yasnas, which consist of litanies of the same kind, and of five *Gâthâs* or hymns. These *Gâthâs* were written in a more archaic dialect, older than the language of the

Avesta. A great many of these books are lost.

Like the Pentateuch of Moses, the Avesta contains direct conversations between the prophet Zarathustra, and his God, Ahura Mazda. As the religion of Jehovah was revealed to Moses, so the religion of Ahura Mazda was revealed to Zarathustra. As in Genesis we read the Lord Yahveh created this world in six days, so in the Avesta it is said that Ahura Mazda created this world in six periods. Adam and Eve of the Avesta, are Mashya and Mashyana, the first man and woman created by Ahura Mazda. There is a deluge described in the Avesta, but with this difference from the Biblical story, that instead of Noah's Ark, an underground place was built for the protection of all species.

Zoroastrianism teaches that Ahura Mazda, the one supreme Lord of the universe, created man and gave him his body and mind. He nourishes and protects all. Man cannot do any good act alone by his will and intellect, without the grace of the Lord, for his will and intellect are bound to the infinite will and infinite intellect. He is compelled as a delegated spiritual power on earth to maintain the righteous order of the world, and, therefore, is responsible for his thoughts and deeds. Through good thoughts and righteous deeds he will eventually approach his Creator and will receive heavenly glory and eternal happiness.

The following quotation from Zend Avesta

(Vendîdâd, Fargard XIX), will explain this more clearly :

27 (89). O Maker of the material world, thou holy One ! Where are the rewards given ? Where does the rewarding take place ? Where is the rewarding fulfilled ? Where to do men come to take the reward that, during their life in the material world, they have won for their souls ?

28 (90). Ahura Mazda answered : When the man is dead, when his time is over, then the wicked, evil-doing Dævas cut off his eye-sight. On the third night, when the dawn appears and brightens up, when Mithra, the god with beautiful weapons, reaches the all-happy mountains, and the sun is rising :

29 (94). Then the fiend, named Vîsaresha, O Spitamâ Zarathustra, carries off in bonds the souls of the wicked Dæva-worshippers who live in sin. The soul enters the way made by Time, and open both to the wicked and to the righteous. At the head of the Chinvad bridge, the holy bridge made by Mazda, they ask for their spirits and souls the reward for the worldly goods which they gave away here below.

30 (98). Then comes the beautiful, well-shapen, strong and well-formed maid, with the dogs at her sides, one who can distinguish, who has many children, happy, and of high understanding.

She makes the soul of the righteous one go up above the Haraberezaiti ; above the Chinvad bridge

she places in the presence of the heavenly gods themselves.

31 (102). 'Up rises Vohu-mano from his golden seat ; Vohu-mano exclaims : "How hast thou come to us, thou holy One, from that decaying world into this undecaying one" ?'

32 (105). Gladly pass the souls of the righteous to the golden seat of Ahura Mazda, to the golden seat of the Amesha-Spentas, to the Garo-nmânem, the abode of Ahura Mazda. the abode of the Amesha-Spentas, the abode of all the other holy beings.

33 (108). 'As to the godly man that has been cleansed, the wicked evil-doing Daevas tremble at the perfume of his soul after death, as doth a sheep on which a wolf is pouncing.

34 (110). 'The souls of the righteous are gathered together there : Nairyo-sangha is with them ; a messenger of Ahura Mazda is Nairyo-sangha'.

The Avesta tells us that the highest aim of our earthly life is to attain perfect happiness, which consists in the perfection of life, in the best or delightful thought, in the best or purest soul, and in the best or glorified body ; secondly, it lies in the sight, conference and companionship of Ahura Mazda, The means for attaining this everlasting happiness that is given in this religion in *Asha* or holiness, which consists of two endeavours : to know God's will, and to act in harmony with it. Therefore it is necessary for man to study the

scriptures to observe the law, and to perform his duty to God, to his fellowman and to himself. This word *Asha* or holiness includes all the principles of morality, It was so strongly emphasized by Zoroaster that it occurs in almost every chapter of the Zend Avesta. In fact holiness is the soul of Zoroastrianism. It teaches that holiness is happiness, and that is the most valuable gift of Ahura Mazda and it is the best offering to be presented to the Lord by the righteous.

Zoroastrianism is a religion of absolute faith, implicit confidence and unswerving devotion to Ahura Mazda. It is like the Bhakti Yoga or the path of devotion in the dualistic phase of the universal religion of Vedānta. It inculcates constant prayers, offerings, sacrifices and thanksgiving by the devotee to the Lord. Whatever a devotee wishes to attain, he must earnestly pray for to Ahura Mazda, who will grant his demands. Therefore it is right to ask for knowledge, grace, forgiveness, happiness and blessings. "I cry unto Thee, O Lord ! behold my condition, I ask of Thee help and grace as a friend asks of his friend. Reveal unto me through righteousness, the Good Mind's wealth", "As Thou, O Ahura Mazda ! hast thought spoken, created and done everything good, therefore do we offer to Thee, therefore do we ascribe to Thee our praises, worship Thee and bow before Thee with confessions of our debt".

There are prayers to purge away sins by repen-

tance : "Of all my sins I repent with a *Patet*. For all evil thoughts words and actions, which are ill thought, ill spoken and ill done in this world ; for all sinfull thoughts, sinful words and sinful deeds, for all bodily or earthly, mental or spiritual sins, I ask, O God, for forgiveness, and repent of them all with the three words."

Of all the Avestan prayers, *Ashem Vohū* and *Yathâ-Ahū-Vairyo*, are most important, and most frequently to be recited and often in quick succession. They are as follows ; May Ahura Mazda be rejoiced ! " *Ashem vohū*. "Holiness is good ; it is the best of all good. Holiness is happiness. Happiness is due to him who is best in holiness".

"I confess myself a worshipper of Mazda, a follower of Zarathustra, one who hates the Dævas and obeys the Law of Ahura."

Yathâ-Ahu-Vairyō : "The will of the Lord is the law of holiness. As is the will of the Lord, the righteous person (is) in accordance with the Divine order, an upholder of goodminded actions in this world for Mazda and (supporter of) the Kingdom for Ahura (on earth) which offers help and protection to the poor."

Charity is one of the cardinal virtues of Zoroastrianism. Sins can be atoned for, or expiated by charitable deeds. Kind treatment of animals is another virtue. The Avesta teaches : "Do not acquire the riches of the material world at the cost

of the spiritual world. For he who destroys the spiritual world in order to obtain the riches of the material world shall possess neither the celestial light nor the Paradise of Ahura Mazda."

Zoroastrianism does not teach polygamy, but regards marriage as one of the most inviolable contracts. Children are considered as blessing and childlessness as a great curse, as a great punishment for having committed crimes. It upholds purity and cleanliness of the physical body, inculcates the sacredness of fire, water and earth, and describes purification ceremonies to purify these three elements of nature.

According to the teachings of the Avesta, all dead bodies of animals as well as of human beings, are impure, and for this reason the Zoroastrians are forbidden to pollute these sacred elements by burying, or burning the dead bodies, or by throwing them into the water. It teaches that it is sinful to burn or bury the dead, that the ground, on which the dead matter lies, is unfit for agriculture; that the ground of the grave is unclean and impure, and it does not become purified, untill fifty years have passed from the time, when the corpse is buried. Therefore the injunction of the Avesta for the disposal of the dead body is that the corpse should be placed high up in the air that it may be devoured by beasts and birds, and that not a particle of it must fall in water, earth or fire and thus pollute them. At first they used to lay the corpse on the

summit of a mountain upon stones, but now they build *Dakhmas* or "Towers of Silence" for this purpose.

Zoroastrianism is not a system of philosophy, but a revealed religion of faith and devotion. It is not in harmony with modern science, which is based upon the theory of evolution, nor does it teach the reincarnation of souls. Ordinarily, it is called a religion of fire worship, but in reality it does not teach the worship of fire, nor does it advocate nature worship.

Sacred fire upon the alter in a temple is kept as a symbol which reminds the devotee of the glory of Ahura Mazda. It is regarded as the great purifier of all substances of nature and the giver of comfort. It is called *Atar* in the Avesta. *Atar* and *Asha* are most intimately connected with each other and for this reason a Zoroastrian invokes them together : "O Thou Spirit (God) ! give us that joy and satisfaction through Thy *Atar* and *Asha*." Like fire, Mithra (sun) is regarded as the representative of the Lord. The Avesta says that Ahura and Mithra should be invoked together since Ahura Mazda is full of light and there is no darkness in His abode.

As the Hindus of the vedic age kept sacred fire in the temples, poured oblations in it and prayed to the supreme Lord of the universe facing the blazing fire, the rising or setting sun, so the followers of Zarathustra having descended from the same Aryan

stock, have preserved the custom of their ancient forefathers and have handed it down to the Parsees of modern India. Those who have been in Bombay have noticed how the Parsees, standing on the seashore, repeat their prayers, and bend their knees in reverence before the setting sun. A Zoroastrian is strictly enjoined to face a luminous object or a beautiful flower at the time of his devotional exercises.

*HYMN:FROM THE
YASNA-ZEND-AVESTA*

We worship the Spirit Divine,
 All wisdom and goodness possessing,
 Surrounded by holy Immortals,
 The givers of bounty and blessing,
 We joy in the works of His hands,
 His truth and His powers confessing.
 We praise all the things that are pure,
 For these are His only Creation ;
 The thoughts that are true, and the words
 And deeds that have won approbation ;
 These are supported by Him
 And for these we make adoration.
 Hear us, O Mazda ! Thou livest
 In truth and in heavenly gladness ;
 Cleanse us from falsehood, and keep us
 From evil and bondage to badness ;
 Pour out the light and the joy of Thy life
 On our darkness and sadness.

Shine on our gardens and fields,
Shine on our working and weaving ;
Shine on the whole race of man,
Believing and unbelieving ;
Shine on us now through the night,
Shine on us now in Thy might,
The flame of our holy love
And the song of our worship receiving.

The principal tenets of Zoroastrianism are summarized in the Catechism Mazdashna of the modern Parsees, thus : What commands has God sent us through His prophet Zarathustra ?

"Many are those commands of which these are the principal ones."

"To know God as one : to know the prophet, Zarathustra as His true prophet ; to believe the religion and the Avesta brought by him as true beyond all manner of doubt ; to believe in the goodness of God ; not to disobey any of the commands of the Mazdashna religion ; to avoid all evil deeds ; to exert for good deeds ; to pray five times in the day ; to believe in the reckoning and justice on the fourth morning after death ; to hope for heaven and fear hell ; to consider doubtless the day of general destruction, and purification of all beings to remember always that God has done what He willed, and shall do what He wills ; to face some luminous object while worshipping God."

"What are those things by which man is blessed and benefited ?"

"To do virtuous deeds, to give in charity, to be kind, to be humble, to speak sweet words, to wish good to others, to have a clear heart, to acquire learning, to speak the truth, to suppress anger, to be patient and contented, to be friendly, to feel shame, to pay due respect to the old and young, to be pious to respect our parents and teachers ; all these are the friends of the good man and enemies of bad men."

Such are the teachings of Zoroaster, the great Prophet and Saviour of Iran.

CHAPTER IV

LAO-TZE AND HIS TEACHINGS

There are three religions in China, Confucianism, Tâoism. and Buddhism ; or in other words, we may say that the religion of China inculcates the tenets of Confucianism, Tâoism, and Buddhism. For nearly two thousand years these three have existed in perfect harmony, moulding the social, political, moral and religious ideais of nearly four hundred millions of people. Confucianism and Tâoism are religions indigenous to the country, while Buddhism was introduced from India in the year 65 A. D. The founders of the former were Confucious and Lâo-Tze, both of whom lived at the same time in the Sixth Century B. C. It is very remarkable to notice how the tremendous tidal wave of spirituality inundated the Asiatic Continent, revealing four great shining stars, the perfected souls on the highest crest of that spiritual wave : one in Persia, Zoroaster, the great prophet of Iran, and the founder of Zoroastrianism ; the second in India, Buddha, the great founder of Buddhism ; while the third and fourth were in China. They all appeared almost simultaneously in the same spiritual cycle, brought Divine wisdom with them and afterwards became the moral and spiritual leaders among different nations. Each of them helped mankind by distributing that wisdom, and by founding the



LÃO-TZE.

Lao-Tze
Old Master

religion which was suited to the peoples among whom they flourished.

The two Chinese prophets, Confucious and Lâo-Tze, are not regarded as saviours like Krishna and Buddha, but are known as great sages and philosophers. The teacher of Tâoism was fifty-three years older than Confucius, but they met each other, and the substance of their conversation has been handed down to us by Chinese historians.

Unlike Confucianism, Christianity, Buddhism or Mohammedanism, the religion of Tâoism was not named after its founder. Lâo-Tze. He was born in 604 B. C. in the third year of the reign of the Emperor Ting Wang, of the Cho Dynasty. We do not know the name of his parents. Tradition says: "The master Lâo was conceived under the influence of a star. When he received the breath of life we cannot fathom, but once when asked, he pointed to the plum tree (in Chinese 'Li') under which he was born, and adopted it as his surname. We do not understand whence came the musical sounds that were heard, but he kept his marvellous powers concealed in the womb of his mother for more than seventy years. When he was born the hair of his head was already white, and he took the designation of Lâo-Tze (Old Boy)." These words were inscribed in 586 A. D. by the Emperor Wan Ti on the stone tablet in the temple, built in memory of Lâo-Tze at his birth place, in the village of Chu-Jhren, Li Country, belonging to

the Ku province of the State Chu. It lies in the east of what is now the province of Honan. Besides this inscription on the stone tablet, we find a very brief account of Lâu-Tze's life in the famous historical records, or Shi-ki of Szema-chien, the Herodotus of Chinese history. This Shi-Ki was completed in the year 91 B. C. We have still another short account of Lâu-Tze's life, by his renowned follower, Chwang-Tze, who lived in 330 B. C.

Both of these accounts say that the family name of this great Soul was Li (plum tree), and his name was Er (ear), but after his death he was called Tan, meaning (long lobed), long lobes being a sign of virtue. His appellation was Po Yang, of Count of Positive principle. He was popularly called Lâu-Tze (the Old Boy, or Philosopher), which signifies 'One who remains childlike even when old.' Lâu-Tze was one of the recorders at the Royal Court of Cho and especially in charge of the secret archives, as State historian.

In the year 517 B. C., Confucius (who was then about 35 years old) went to the library of Cho in order to consult Lâu-Tze on some ceremony regarding ancestor-worship. Referring to the ancestors, Lâu-Tze said to Confucius :

"The men about whom you talk are dead, and their bones are mouldered in dust ; only their words are left. If a nobleman finds his time he rises, but if he does not find his time he drifts like

a roving plant, and wanders about. I observe that the wise merchant hides his treasures deeply and appears as if he is poor ; and that the wise man, though his virtue be complete, assumes an attitude as though he were stupid. Put away your proud airs, your many desires, your affection and wild plans. They are of no advantage to you, Sir. This is all I have to tell you, Sir."

Hearing this, Confucius left, and being unable to grasp Lâu-Tze's ideas, he said to his disciples: "I know how the birds can fly, fishes swim, and animals run ; but the runner may be snared ; swimmer hooked, and the flyer shot by the arrow. But there is the Dragon—I cannot tell how he mounts on the wind through the clouds, and rises to heaven. Today I have seen Lâu-Tze, and can only compare him to the Dragon."

The historian also says that Lâu-Tze lived most of his life in Cho, cultivated the Tào and its attributes, and his chief aim was to keep himself concealed and unknown. But seeing the decay of the dynasty, he left Cho, and went away to the barrier gate leading out of the Kingdom on the Northwest frontier. There the custom house officer Yin Hsi said to Lâu-Tze : "Sir, you are about to retire, let me request you to compose a book for me." To fulfil his request, the old philosopher wrote a book in two parts, setting forth his views on Tào and its attributes in more than five thousand Chinese characters.

Then he departed, and no one knows where he died.

This is the whole of the historical account of Lâu-Tze's life that we can get. Some European scholars, like Prof. Doglas, believe that Lâu-Tze was a descendant of the western nation of the Chinese Empire, which may have had connection with India in ancient times. He also maintains that his peculiar long ear was the sign of his non-Chinese tribe, which inhabited the Western frontiers of old China. His surname, Li indicates that perhaps Lâu-Tze descended from the important tribe of that name, which was dispossessed by the invading Chinese, and was driven to seek refuge in South-western China. Further more, Prof. Doglas says; "However that may be, it is impossible to overlook the fact that he imported into his teachings a decided flavour of Indian philosophy." He goes so far as to say that Lâu-Tze's Tâu resembles the Brâhman of the Vadânta of pre-Buddhistic Indian sages.

The teachings of Lâu-Tze are contained in the book which he wrote himself in the Sixth Century B. C. and which is known as Tâu-Têh-King. This title was given by Emperor Ching of the Han Dynasty in 156-143 B. C. He issued an imperial decree that Lâu-Tze's work on Tâu and the Teh, which means the virtue or characteristics of Tâu, should be respected as a canonical book or 'King.' Hence it is called Tâu-Têh-King.

The term 'Tão' has been a subject of great discussion among different European scholars. Some have translated it as 'The Way'; others have called it 'The Eternal Word' or 'Logos'; others again 'Eternal Being.' Some called it 'Reason', others say it is the same as 'Nature' of modern science. The Buddhists use the term 'Tão' for enlightenment, and so on. It literally means 'Path' or 'way' or 'Method'. As the word 'Brahman' of Vedânta cannot be translated into English by one word, so there is no English term for 'Tão'.

Lão-Tze says Tão is One; it was in the beginning, and it will remain for ever. It is eternal and immutable; it is omnipresent, bodiless, immaterial, and imperceptible by the senses. It is nameless and indescribable. We look at it, and do not see it, and we name it the Equable; we listen to it, and do not hear it, and we name it the Inaudible; we try to grasp it, and we do not get hold of it, and we name it the Subtle; with these three qualities it cannot be made subject of description, hence we blend them together, and obtain the One. It is called the mysterious abyss of existence. It is the mother of all phenomena, of heaven and earth, it existed before the personal God. It is the producer of God, just as in Vedânta, we know that *Isvara* or the personal God is the first manifestation of Brahman.

Tão is impersonal, yet it is individualized in all living creatures, especially in man. As in Vedânta,

Brahman, the absolute Being, when individualized, is called Jivâtman, so Tâo or The Way of Heaven, when individualized, is called the Tâo or 'Way of Man'. The 'Way of Heaven' and the 'Way of Man' are far apart, yet they are one in reality. Chwang-Tze says: "What is it that we call the Tâo? There is the Tâo or Way of Heaven; and there is the Tâo or way of Man. Doing nothing and yet attracting all honour is the Way of Heaven; doing, and plays the part of the servant. The way of Man. It is the Way of Heaven that plays the part of the Lord; it is the Way of Man that plays the part of the servant. The Way of Heaven and the Way of Man are far apart. They should be clearly distinguished from each other".¹

Thus the student of Vedânta will be able to understand the Philosophy of Lâo-Tze more easily than the majority of European scholars who do not know Vedânta. Tâo is prior to God. Lâo-Tze says: "I do not know whose son it is. It might appear to have been before God",²

"I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of the Tâo (the Way or Course). Making an effort (further) to give it a name I call it The Great.

"Great, it passes on (in constant flow). Passing on, it becomes remote. Having become remote, it

1. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXXIX, p. 806.

2. *Tâo-Teh-King*, Ch. IV, Verses 1, 2.

returns. Therefore the Tào is great ; Heaven is great ; earth is great ; and the (sage) king is also great. In the universe, there are four that are great, and the (sage) king is one of them."

"Man takes his law from the earth ; the earth takes its law from Heaven ; Heaven takes its law from the Tào. The law of the Tào is its being what it is."³

"The Tào that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tào. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name."

"(Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of Heaven and earth ; (conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things".⁴

It is difficult for Christians to believe that there can be anything that is prior to God ; or in other words, that which is God's Ancestor or Father. But according to Lâu-Tze, Tào is the Father of God. This idea we do not find in any other philosophy than Vedânta, which teaches that the absolute Brahman, which is nameless, formless, incomprehensible and yet the source of all phenomena, like the Tào, is prior to *Isvara*, the personal God.

Again, Tào manifests itself in the Laws of Nature. Tào is not merely an abstract principle, it is the object of awe and reverence. In an interview with Confucius, Lâu-Tze spoke about Tào, as given in the texts of Tàoism :

3. *Táo-Teh-King*, Ch. XXV, Verses 2, 3, 4.

4. *Táo-Tek-King*, Ch. IV, Verses 1, 2.

"When Confucius was in his fifty-first year, he had not heard of the Tào, and went south to Phei to see Lâu Tan, who said to him, 'You have come, Sir ; have you ? I have heard that you are the wisest man of the North ; have you also got the Tào ?' 'Not yet' was the reply ; and other went on, 'How have you sought it ?' Confucius said : 'I sought it in measures and numbers, and after five years I had not got it'. 'And how then did you seek it ?' 'I sought it in the Yin and Yang, and after twelve years I have not found it'. Lâu-Tze said, 'Just so ! If the Tào could be presented (to another) men would all present it to their rulers ; if it could be served up (to others) men would all serve it up to their parents ; if it could be told (to others) men would all tell it to their brothers ; if it could be given (to others) men would all give it to their sons and grandsons. The reason why it, cannot be transmitted is no other but this—that it within, there be not the presiding principle, if will not remain there, and if, outwardly, there be not the correct obedience it will not be carried out. When that which is given out from the mind (in possession of it) is not received by the mind without, the sage will not give it out ; and when, entering in from without, there is no power in the receiving mind to entertain it the sage will not permit it to lie hid there. Fame is a possession common to all ; we should not seek to have much of it. Benevolence and righteousness were as the lodging houses of the

former kings ; we should only rest in them for a night, and not occupy them for long. (If men see us doing so, they will have much to say against us.)

"The perfect men of old trod the path of benevolence as a path which they borrowed for the occasion, and dwelt in Righteousness as in a lodging which they used for a night. Thus they rambled in the vacancy of Untroubled Ease, found their food in the fields of Indifference, and stood in the gardens which they had not borrowed. Untroubled Ease requires the doing of nothing : Indifference is easily supplied with nourishment ; not borrowing needs no outlay. The ancients called this the Enjoyment that collects the True."

"Those who think that wealth is the proper thing for them cannot give up their revenues ; those who seek distinction cannot give up the thought of fame ; those who cleave to power cannot give the handle of it to others. While they hold their grasp of those things, they are afraid (of losing them). When they let them go, they are grieved, and they will not look at a single example, from which they might perceive the (folly) of their restless pursuits : such men are under the doom of heaven."

"Hatred and kindness ; taking and giving ; reproof and instruction ; death and life :—these eight things are instruments of rectification, but only those are able to use them who do not obstinately refuse to comply with their great changes.

Hence it is said "Correction is Rectification". When the minds of some do not acknowledge this it is because the gate of Heaven (in them) has not been opened.'"⁵

Chwang-Tze, the follower of Lâu-Tze, says : "This is the Tâu ; there is in It emotion and sincerity, but It does nothing and has no bodily form. It may be handed down (by the teacher) but may not be received (by his scholars). It may be apprehended (by the mind), but It cannot be seen. It has its root and ground (of existence) in Itself. Before there were heaven and earth, from of old, there It was securely existing. From It came *the mysterious existences* of spirits, from It the mysterious existence of God. It produced heaven ; It produced earth. It was before the primordial ether."⁶

Does this not remind one of similar passages of the ancient Upanishads which describe the nature of Brahman ?

Regarding Tâu, Lâu-Tze himself says that Tâu produces all things, and nourishes them, it produces them and does not claim them, as its own ; it does all yet it does not boast of it ; it presides over all, and does not control them. That is what is called the mysterious quality of the Tâu.

"All things are produced by the Tâu, and nourished by its outflowing operation. They receive their

5. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 354-357.

6. *Ibid*, p. 243.

forms according to the nature of each, and are completed according to the circumstances of their condition. Therefore all things without exception honour the Tão, and exalt its outflowing operation.”⁷

As Brahman, the Absolute is the cornerstone of the philosophy and religion of Vedânta, so Tão, the Absolute and Eternal One is the fundamental principle of the philosophy and religion of Lâu-Tze. The word ‘God’ (in Chinese ‘T’i’) is mentioned only once in Chapter IV, describing Him as posterior to Tão. Lâu-Tze never identified Tão with God as his later followers have done. Furthermore, there is a great similarity in the methods of realizing the Tão as given by Lâu-Tze, to those given in Vedânta, especially in Râja Yoga. Lâu-Tze speaks of what is called in Râja Yoga *samâdhi*, in these words: “The excellence of mind is in abysmal stillness”. He also speaks of purity, kindness towards all living creatures, contentment, self-control, and higher knowledge as the means for attaining the Tão. Concentration and breathing exercises are also considered to be helpful in the path of Tão. Lâu-Tze says: “When one gives undivided attention to the vital breath and brings it to the utmost degree of pliancy he can become as tender as a babe; when he has cleansed away the most mysterious sights (of his imagination) he can become without a flaw.”

7. *Tão-Teh-King*, Ch. LI, Verse 1.

Again he says : "He (who knows the Tâo) will keep his mouth shut, and close the portals (of his nostrils), (the gates of the senses). He will blunt his sharp points and unravel the complications of things ; he will attemper his brightness, and bring himself into agreement with the obscurity (of others). This is called the 'Mysterious Agreement'.

"(Such an one) cannot be treated familiarly or distantly ; he is beyond all consideration of profit or injury ; of nobility or meanness ; he is the noblest man under heaven."⁸ Compare the above with the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gitâ*.

Chawang-Tze says : "What is meant by 'the True Man' ? The true Men of old did not reject (the views of) the few ; they did not seek to accomplish (their ends) like heroes (before other) ; they did not lay plans to attain those ends. Being such, though they might make mistakes, they had no occasion for repentance ; though they might succeed, they had no self-complacency. Being such, they could ascend the loftiest heights without fear ; they could pass through water without being made wet by it ; they could go into fire without being burnt ; so it was that by their knowledge they ascended to and reached the Tâo.

"The True men of old did not dream, when they slept, had no anxiety, when they awoke, and did not care that their food should be pleasant. Their breathing came deep and silently. The breathing of

8. *Tâo-Teh-King* Ch. LVI, Verses 2, 3.

the true man comes (even) from his heels, while men generally breathe (only) from their throats. When men are defeated in argument, their words come from their gullets as if they were vomiting. Where lusts and desires are deep, the springs of the Heavenly are shallow.

"The True men of old knew nothing of the love of life or of the hatred of death. Entrance into life occasioned them no joy ; the exit from it awakened no resistance. Composedly they went and came. They did not forget what their beginning had been, and they did not inquire into what their end would be. They accepted (their life) and rejoiced in it ; they forgot (all feare of death) and returned (to their state before life). Thus there was in them what is called the want of any mind to resist the Tâo; and of all attempts by means of the Human to assist the Heavenly. Such were they who are called the True men."⁹

When love and enmity, profit and loss, favour and disgrace do not affect the sage—he becomes world-honoured. Does this not remind us of the sage described in the *Bhagavad Gitâ* by Krishna, in 1400 B. C. ?

Lão-Tze, like Krishna, spoke of non-attachment to the works of the senses.

"The way of the Tâo," says Lão-Tze, "is to act without thinking of acting ; to conduct affairs without feeling the trouble of them, to taste without

9. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 237-238.

discerning any flavour ; to consider what is small as great, and a few as many ; and to recompense injury with kindness."

Lão-Tze describes the heart of a holy man : "The holy man possesses not a fixed heart. The hundred families heart he makse his heart. He universalizes his heart and the hundred families fix upon him their eyes and ears. The holy man treats them as all his children. The holy man does not travel and yet he has knowledge. He does not see the things, and yet he defines them. He does not labour and yet he completes."

Lão-Tze taught self-restraint and renunciation. He says : "No greater sin than yielding to desire ; no greater misery than discontent ; no greater calamity than acquisitiveness."

As Christ said : "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you". So did Lão-Tze teach nearly 600 years before Christ, "Let the eternal Tão have its way, and otherwise be heedless of consequences, for all will be well".

Virtue according to Lão-Tze meant, "To imitate in all things Heaven's Tão".

Lão-Tze taught the virtue of simplicity in habits, saying : "Abandon your scheming ; put away your gains, and thieves and robbers will not exist".

"Hold fast to that wich will endure,
Show thyself simple, preserve thee pure,

Thine own keep small, thy desires poor."

He taught his disciples ; "Renounce learnedness, and you have no vexation".

According to Lâo-Tze the holy man or sage is he who manages affairs without doing anything, and conveys his instructions without the use of speech : "The multitude of men look satisfied and pleased, as if enjoying a full banquet, as if mounted on a tower in spring. "I alone," says Lâo-Tze, "seem listless and still, my desires having as yet given no indication of their presence. I am like an infant which has not yet smiled".

Lâo-Tze believed not in artificial modes of government by making strict laws, not in war, but in allowing nature to take its own course. He says : "I will do nothing (with purpose), and the people will be transformed of themselves. I will be fond of keeping still, and the people will of themselves become correct. I will take no trouble about it, and the people will of themselves become rich ; I will manifest no ambition, and the people will of themselves attain to the primitive simplicity".

Lâo-Tze requests the government simply to administer, and not to govern. He does not believe in its interfering with the natural development of the people, but he urges everybody to practice non-acting, non-meddling, and non-interference. His ideal was : "The less laws and prohibitions there are, the less crime will there be. The less welfare of the people is forced by artificial

methods, the greater will be their wealth and prosperity."

Through this kind of non-action (or 'Wu-Wei' in Chinese) everything can be accomplished. Philo, the Neo-Platonist, conceived of God as 'Non-action'. He called God the 'Non-actor'. By this he did not mean that God is passive, but that He is Absolute Existence. Indeed, God's activity does not mean exertion, as many people think, but it means 'His Omnipresent Effectiveness'.

Lão-Tze's philosophy exerted a strong influence on Tolstoi, who also regard non-action as a virtue, while labour as non-virtue. Thus Lão-Tze's philosophy stands in strong contrast to the philosophy of Confucius. Confucius stood for good government, laws of propriety, and good manners, but Lão-Tze did not believe in moralizing, but in natural spontaneity of the heart of the people and independence. Confucius sought the favour of Kings and princes, while Lão-Tze renounced them all. Confucius wanted to reform the external habits of life, but Lão-Tze wanted to reform the internal bent of the heart of the people.

"At an interview with Lây Tan, Confucius spoke to him of benevolence and righteousness. Lão Tan said : 'If you winnow chaff, and the dust gets into your eyes, then the places of heaven and earth and of the four cardinal points are all changed to you. If mosquitoes or gadflies puncture your skin, it will keep you all the night from sleeping. But this

painful iteration of benevolence and righteousness excites my mind and produces in it the greatest confusion. If you, Sir, would cause men not to lose their natural simplicity, and if you would also imitate the wind in its (unconstrained) movements, and stand forth in all the natural attributes belonging to you ! —“why must you use so much energy, and carry a great drum to seek for the son whom you have lost ? The snow-goose does not bathe every day to make itself white, nor the crow blacken itself every day to make itself black. The natural simplicity of their black and white does not afford any ground for controversy ; and the fame and praise which men like to contemplate do not make them greater than they naturally are. When the springs (supplying the pools) are dried up, the fishes huddle together on the dry land. Than that they should moisten one another there by their gasping, and keep one another wet by their milt, it would be better for them to forget one another in the rivers and lakes’ ”.¹⁰

Confucius taught the Golden Rule for the first time in China in the Sixth Century B. C., although it was inculcated in India by the Vedic sages as well as by Krishna and other saviours. [The Christians claim that Christ taught it for the first time, but the fact is that it was Rabbi Hillel (who died when Christ was ten years old), who preached it among

10. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXXIX, p. 357.

the Jews for the first time.] Confucius, however put the same idea in a negative form : "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others". But Lâo-Tze, like Krishna and Buddha, went beyond this in the field of ethics, by teaching 'Return good for evil'. When Confucius was asked by one of his disciples regarding the truth of this teaching of Lâo-Tze, he replied : "What then will you return for good ? Recompense injury with justice and return good for good". Hearing this Lâo-Tze said . "The good I meet with goodness, the bad I also meet with goodness, for virtue is good throughout".

"There are three precious things," says Lâo-Tze, which I prize and hold fast. The first is gentle compassion ; the second is economy ; the third is humility (not presuming to take precedence in the world). With gentle compassion I can be brave, with economy I can be liberal. Not presuming to claim precedence in the world, I can make myself a vessel fit for the most distinguished services." Indeed, Lâo-Tze was a great Yogi !

Thus we see that Lâo-Tze's philosophy inculcated the highest ethics, the purest method of living and a grand discipline for mind and body. It had also the germ of a monistic religion, like that of Vedânta although it was never developed in the same manner as it was in India.

The followers of Lâo-Tze retired from the world, lived in caves and forests like the Yogis of India,

and practised the virtues taught by their master. The list of the Tâoist hermits in China is a very long one. They spent their lives in secluded retreats shut in by mountains, sheltered from the burning sun by the thick foliage of trees, striving to rise above love and hatred, pleasure and pain, and to attain the original purity and simplicity to Tâo. Even now there are to be found some Tâoist hermits in the caves of the Mount of a Hundred Flowers. Their arms are crossed against their breasts and their nails have grown so long that they curl around their necks. Some of them are over three hundred years old, according to the Tâoists of China.

Chawang-Tze, the renowned follower of Lâo-Tze, was a great sage. He realized Tâo, and interpreted the Master's ideas in his lucid and elegant style. He considered the world as a dream. He says: "How do I know that the love of life is not a delusion? And that the dislikes of death is not like a young person's losing his way, and not knowing that he is (really) going home? * * Those who dream of (the pleasures of) drinking, may in the morning wail and weep; those who dream of wailing and weeping may in the morning be going out to hunt. When they were dreaming they did not know it was a dream; * * but when they awoke they knew that it was a dream. And there is a

great awaking, after which we shall know that this life was a great dream.”¹¹

Does not this sound like the utterance of one who is a true Jñana Yogi ?

There is a very interesting story told of Chawang-Tze himself on his deathbed. At the last moment he requested his weeping relatives to leave his body uninterred. He said ; “I will have heaven and earth for my sarcophagus, the sun and moon shall be the insignia, where I lie in state and all creation shall be mourners at my funeral”. When his friends implored him to withdraw his request, because the birds would mutilate his corpse, he smiled and said : “What matters that ? Above are the birds of the air, below are the worms and ants ; if you rob one to feed the other, what injustice is there done” ?

Tâoism did not begin to be a popular religion, until after the introduction of Buddhism in China. At that time the pure teachings of Lâo-Tze were mixed with all kinds of superstition, ancestor-worship, spirit-worship, pursuit of Alchemy, search after the pills of immortality, black magic, and sorcery. These corruptions are still very predominant in modern Tâoism. Like the Dâlai Lâmo of Tibet, and the Catholic Pope of Rome, Tâoism has its Pope, whose name is Chang and who is commonly called Chang Tien Shih or Chang, the Heavenly Teacher. He is the incarnation of the first Chang

11. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 194-195.

Tão-Ling or Pope, who lived in the first century A. D. He has a palace in the province of Kianghsi, where he has all the comforts and luxuries of an actual sovereign. He is a great exorcist, and wards off evil spirits, many of whom he has bottled up in jars kept in long rows in the palace.

As in Buddhist temples in China, there are images of three precious ones, *Buddha*, *Dharma* and *Saṅgha*, so in modern Tãoism, there are three pure or holy ones, the Perfect Holy One, the Highest Holy One, and the Greatest Holy One. The Perfect Holy One is the first. It represents something like God the Father, who presided over chaos at the beginning of the evolution of the world.

Here we should remember that Tãoism does not believe in Creation, neither in a Creator, but in evolution, and Tão is the starter of evolution, the transformer. The second of the Tãoist Trinity is called The Highest Holy one, who is the most high Prince, Lâu, the usual title of Lâu-Tze. The third is the greatest Holy One, or the great virtue of Lâu-Tze and his teaching.

Tãoism has borrowed from Buddhism this idea of Trinity as well as its form of worship, liturgies, and temples with images, which did not exist before advent of Buddhism in China. Like Buddhism, Tãoism has its monks and nuns who wear yellow caps. Tãoism has also borrowed from Buddhism the idea of a Purgatory and of the reward and punishment after death, as also the idea of rebirth.

But Lâo-Tze believed in the immortality of the soul and said : "He who dies and yet does not perish has longevity". He also advocated the theory of reincarnation or transformation of the soul after death. He never feared death, but called it a natural end of coming. The greatest of Lâo-Tze's appeals was for self-conquest. As, in Vedânta, self-conquest is considered as the highest virtue, so Lâo-Tze says : "He who overcomes others is strong, but he who overcomes himself is mighty". According to Lâo-Tze, the realization of Tâo through self-conquest is the attainment of salvation.

"The Heaven-honoured One says : 'Sincerity is the first step towards (the knowledge of) the Tâo ; it is by silence that knowledge is maintained ; it is with gentleness that (the Tâo) is employed. The employment of sincerity looks like stupidity ; the employment of silence looks like difficulty of utterance ; the employment of gentleness looks like want of ability. But having attained to this you may forget all bodily form ; you may forget your personality ; you may forget that you are forgetting. He who has taken the first steps towards (the knowledge of) the Tâo knows where to stop ; he who maintains the Tâo in himself knows how to be diligently vigilant ; he who employs It knows what is most subtle.

"When one knows what is most subtle, the light of intelligence grows (around him) ; when he

can know how to be diligently vigilant, his sage wisdom becomes complete : when he knows where to stop, he is grandly composed and restful."

" 'When he is grandly composed and restful his sage wisdom becomes complete ; when his sage wisdom becomes complete, the light of intelligence grows (around him) ; when the light of intelligence grows around him, he is one with the Tâo.' "

" 'This is the condition which is styled the Forgetfulness ;—a forgetting which does not forget ; a forgetting of what cannot be forgotten.' "

" 'That which cannot be forgotten is the True Tâo. The Tâo is in heaven and earth, but heaven and earth are not conscious of it. Whether It seem to have feelings or to be without them. It is (always) one and the same.' "12

12. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XL, pp. 266-267.

BUDDHA AND HIS TEACHINGS

From the time of Krishna, the Hindu Christ, down to the present day, India has produced many sages, saints and spiritual leaders of mainkind among whom no one is so widely honoured. revered and worshipped by the vast majority of the civilized world, as is the most illustrious founder of that great religion, known as Buddhism. It is a religion whose followers now outnumber those of any other religion of the world, and the doctrines of which have brought peace and happiness to the souls of millions of suffering people in India, China, Tibet, Burma, Siam, Ceylon, Java, Sumatra and other countries. No other religious reformer has ever attained to such a height of spiritual glory during his life time ; no other Saviour has converted and guided so many souls in the path of righteousness, nor has left so many earnest follower and sincere disciples after him, as did this world renowned Saviour and Redeemer, known as Buddha, 'The Enlightened'. Like the word 'Christ', this Sanskrit term 'Buddha' is a title which was acquired by this great man after he had attained to the highest spiritual enlightenment and divine wisdom. The word 'Buddha' literally means 'The Enlightened'.



Gautama Buddha
Old Master

but before enlightenment his name was Gautama Siddhârtha.

Gautama Siddhârtha was the only son of a powerful sovereign of Northern India, King Suddhodana of the Shâkya tribe, who lived in the seventh century, B. C. The capital of this reigning King was called Kapilâvastu (now known as Padeira), and was the birthplace of Gautama. King Suddhodana lived a pure and virtuous life, always treading the path of righteousness. He married Mâyâ (the daughter of Suprabuddha), a maiden whose character was equally pure and virtuous. It is said that the King being extremely desirous of having a noble and spiritual child, asked his queen, Mâyâ Devi, (the Divine Mâyâ) to live in retirement, leading a life of a holy virgin and not of a wife for a period of thirty-two months. One night the Queen Mâyâ Devi, who was untainted by desire and immaculate, saw in a vision a huge white elephant, radiant with divine glory. The rays of this symbol of a spiritual giant entered into her body and filled her whole being with ecstatic joy and blissful happiness. From that time on, she often used to see the *devas* or angels around her, and in the year 624 B. C., on the day of the full moon in the month of Vaishâkha, while in the garden of Lumbini under a satin tree, she gave birth to a perfect child, as bright as the rising sun.

It is very curious that most of the legends,

connected with the birth of Buddha, have a most remarkable resemblance to the legends regarding the birth of Jesus the Christ. It is said that when the Saviour Buddha was born, all the worlds were flooded with celestial light. The blind received their sight, the deaf heard, the dumb spoke, the crooked became straight, and the lame walked. Like that of Jesus the Christ, his birth was announced by a star, named in Sanskrit, pushyâ. Immediately after his birth, princes and wise men came to see the child with offerings in their hands, and prostrating themselves before the new-born baby showed their reverence to the future Saviour of mankind. The queen-mother was extremely frightened at the commotion which the birth of her innocent child had created. At this time an aged woman came to implore the heavens to bless the child and to remove the doubts of his mother.¹

Among those wise men, there came a holy sage, Asita by name, who may be compared to Simeon of Jesus. This aged seer, beholding the Prince and

1. It reminds one of the aged prophetess Anna, who came to bless the baby Jesus, as is described in Luke, Chapter 2, Verses 36, 37, 38.

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser ; she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity ;

"And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day."

"And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

observing his signs, declared before the anxious King and Queen : "Banish all anxiety and doubt. The spiritual omens manifested indicate that the child now born will, by his powers, bring deliverance to the whole world. He will rule the whole world. He is born for the sake of all that lives." The hearts of royal parents were rejoiced at the comforting words of the hoary sage, and they named the child Siddhârtha, (one who has accomplished the purpose of life). When he was only seven days old, the good Queen said to her sister, Prajâpati-Gautami : "A mother who has borne a future Buddha, will never give birth to another child, I shall soon leave this world, and when I am gone, be thou a mother to my child, Siddhârtha." Thus saying, she passed away. From that time Prajâpati reared the boy.

Very little of the story of the early life of Siddhârtha has been handed down to us, but we know that he was brought up as a Hindu Prince. He received a good education in ethics ; in the various systems of philosophy, and religion of the Vedas, the most ancient scriptures of the world. Those who have read *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold, will remember that from his childhood he was surrounded by all the comforts and luxuries of an Oriental monarch.

Having descended from the royal line of the warrior caste he easily acquired great skill in the use of various offensive and defensive weapons, and

when he was about 18 years of age, Prince Siddhârtha, by displaying his skill and by proving his superiority over his kinsmen in a royal military tournament, won the hand of the beautiful Princess Yashodharâ, the daughter of the king of the Koliya tribe. He was afterwards married to this princess, and for nearly ten years, the young royal couple lived happily and enjoyed all the pleasures of life which their earthly existence could afford. But in the midst of this prosperity, position, wealth, comfort and luxury, the prince felt in his soul a strong yearning for something higher, which neither wealth, prosperity nor princely position could satisfy. Day after day, that fire of yearning burned stronger and stronger and made him more restless. One night when Prince Siddhârtha was fast asleep, he was suddenly awakened by a dream in which he heard the *devas* (bright spirits) sing these words :

We are the voices of the wandering wind,
Which moan for rest, and rest can never find ;
Lo ! as the wind is so is mortal life,
A moan, a sigh, a sob. a storm, a strife.

Wherefore and whence we are ye cannot know,
Nor where life springs, nor whither life doth go ;
We are as ye are, ghosts from the inane,
What pleasure have we of our changeful pain ?
What pleasure hast thou of thy changeless bliss ?
Nay, if love lasted, there were joy in this :

But life's way is the winds' way, all these things
Are but brief voices breathed on shifting strings.

O Mâyâ's son ! because we roam the earth
Moan we upon these strings : we make no mirth,
So many woes we see in many lands,
So many streaming eyes and wringing hands.
Yet mock we while we wail, for, could they know,
This life they cling to is but empty show ;
'Twere all as well to bid a cloud to stand,
Or hold a running river with the hand.

But thou that art to save thine hour is nigh !
The sad world waiteth in its misery,
The blind world stumbleth on its round of pain ;
Rise, Mâyâ's child ! Wake ! Slumber not
again !

We are the voices of the wandering wind :
Wander thou, too, O Prince, thy rest to find ;
Leave love for love of lovers, for woe's sake,
Quit state for sorrow, and deliverance make.

So sigh we, passing o'er the silver strings,
To thee who know'st not yet of earthly things ;
So say we ; mocking, as we pass away,
These lovely shadows wherewith thou dost
play."²

2. Cf. *Light of Asia*, pp. 51-52.

Living in close confinement, as it were, within the four walls of his palace, Prince Siddhârtha at first knew nothing of the hard struggle for existence that was going on outside of the palace walls, nor did he realize that the individual life consisted of a ceaseless fight against environments whose constant companions were misery, suffering, sorrow, unrest, disease, and death. He was taught from his childhood to look upon life from the standpoint of an optimist, but after his dream, he grew eager to see the world and asked permission of his father the King, to do so. King Shuddhodana instantly gave orders to make ready a beautiful chariot, decorated with precious jewels, and drawn by four stately horses, and commanded the roads to be adorned with costly decorations, where the Prince would pass. The houses of the city were decorated with festoons and garlands of beautiful flowers, banners and buntings, and crowds of people lined along both sides of the roads dressed in their best costumes of variegated colours, eager to see the heir to the throne.

"There they met an old man by the wayside. The Prince, seeing the bent frame, the wrinkled face, and the sorrowful brow, said to Chandaka, the charioteer ; "Who is this ? His head is white, his eyes are bleared, and his body is withered. He can barely support himself on his staff.

"The charioteer much embarrassed, hardly dared to answer the truth, He said : 'These are the

symptoms of old age. This same man was once a suckling child, and as a youth full of sportive life ; but now, as years have passed away, his beauty is gone and the strength of his life is wasted."

"Siddhârtha was greatly affected by the words of the charioteer, and he sighed because of the pain of old age. 'What joy or pleasure can men take', he thought to himself, 'when they know must soon wither and pine away !'"

"And lo ! While they were passing on, a sick man appeared on the way-side, gasping for breath, his body disfigured, convulsed and groaning with pain. The Prince asked his charioteer : 'What kind of man is this ?' And the charioteer replied and said : This man is sick. The four elements of his body are confused and out of order. We are all subject to such conditions. The poor and the rich, the ignorant and the wise, all creatures that have bodies, are liable to the same calamity."

"And Siddhârtha was still more moved. All pleasures appeared stale to him, and he loathed the joys of life."

"The charioteer sped the horses on to escape the dreary sigh when suddenly they were stopped in their fiery course. Four persons passed by carrying a corpse ; and the Prince shuddering at the sight of a lifeless body, asked the charioteer : What is this they carry ? There are streamers and flower garlands ; but the men that follow are overwhelmed with grief !"

"The charioteer replied : 'That is a dead man. His body is stark ; his life is gone ; his thoughts are still ; his family and the friends who loved him now carry the corpse to the grave'."

"And the Prince was full of awe and terror. 'Is this the only dead man', he asked, 'or does the world contain other instances ?' "

"With a heavy heart the charioteer replied : 'All over the world it is the same. He who begins life must end it. There is no escape from death'."

"With bated breath and stammering accents the prince exclaimed : 'O worldly men ! how fatal is your delusion. Inevitably your body will crumble to dust, yet carelessly, unheedingly, you live on'."

"The charioteer observing the deep impression these sad sights had made on the prince, turned his horses, and drove back to the city."

"When they passed by the palaces of the nobility, Krishna Gautami, a young princess and niece of the king saw Siddhârtha in his manliness and beauty, and observing the thoughtfulness of his countenance, said : 'Happy the father that begot you, happy that mother that nursed you, happy the wife that calls husband this lord so glorious'."

"The Prince hearing this greeting, said : 'Happy are they that have found deliverance. Longing for peace of mind, I shall seek the bliss of Nirvâna. And handing her his precious pearl necklace as a

reward for the instruction she had given him, he returned home."³

When he came face to face with the sufferings of humanity, his heart became heavy with sadness and his great soul was moved by unutterable compassion and sympathy at the first sight of old age, extreme poverty, and misery of disease and death. It was then that he awoke, as it were, from the sleep of optimistic self-delusion, and could no longer enjoy the luxuries of the artificial life of a prince in the royal palace. He resolved to quit his sweet home and his most beloved wife, in order to satisfy the secret longing of his aspiring soul. He felt keenly the fetters of his princely life.

It was at this time that a son was born unto him. Instead of rejoicing at this news, prince Siddhârtha, whose soul was struggling for freedom, exclaimed: "This is the new, and the strongest tie I shall have to break". His mind became more restless and more unhappy than ever before. He could no longer enjoy the blessings of worldly life, when his all-embracing heart was eagerly searching after a remedy, which would remove the burden of sorrow, misery, disease, and unrest from suffering humanity. That night he could not rest in his soft bed. He arose and walked out into the garden. There sitting under a great Jambu (Rose apple) tree Prince Siddhârtha groaned with pain and meditated upon life and death. He tried to trace the source

3. Cf. Paul Carus: *Gospel of Buddha*, pp. 12, 13, 14.

of the struggle for existence and to discover the causes of misery and suffering which prevail in his world. All worldly desires vanished from his mind and peace reigned over his soul. While he was absorbed in this state of ecstasy, he beheld the majestic figure of a Bhikku (Shramana) under that Jambu tree. The Prince asked : 'Whence dost thou come and who art thou ?' The Bhikku replied : 'I am a Shramana, a mendicant. I have renounced the worldly life and have devoted myself to the path of deliverance from all misery, disease, decay, old age and death. This is the only way to peace and happiness. This is the path for you to follow. Go out, Siddhârtha, and find the goal. Now is the right time for you to leave the palace and to lead the life of a Bhikku. You are now a Bodhisattva, and you are destined to become the Buddha and to enlighten the world'.

Thus saying the Shramana disappeared. His words left a deep impression upon the heart of Siddhârtha. He now resolved to leave the palace, wife and all the luxuries of a princely life. The prince returned to the bedroom of his wife and stood gazing at his beautiful wife, who was asleep and the boy Râhula, who was laying in her arms. Though his heart was overcome with terrible pain of parting, still his mind was determined to renounce everything for the sake of great deliverance from the evils of the world. Thus, when all the members of the royal family, his most faithful

and devoted wife Yoshodharâ and his loving child were fast asleep, Prince Siddhârtha silently walked out of the palace. He mounted his faithful steed Kanthaka and finding the outer gates of the castle wide open he went out into the silent night accompanied by Chandaka the good Charioteer.

Thus prince Siddhârtha at the age of 29 renounced his claim to the throne, and all comforts and pleasures of the princely life not for any selfish motive, but for his extreme love for humanity. How could such a great soul enjoy the pleasures of life, when he realized that thousands were groaning under the unbearable burden of sorrow and suffering? How could he relish the delicious dishes of a prince, when he knew that in the world, hundreds of thousands were dying for want of a few morsels of bread? How could he sleep comfortably in a soft bed, when he saw that the bed of the poor was the bare ground with stones in the place of pillows? Do we ever feel for suffering humanity? No! Do the needs of the poverty-stricken classes touch our hearts? Very seldom indeed! Our thoughts and ideas are centered upon ourselves. We have made ourselves slaves of selfishness.

We feel happy, when we get comfort for our bodies, or for those of the families and children, whom we claim as our own. Think of the vast difference that exists between the ordinary life of a worldly man and woman, and that of the self-sacrificing Prince Siddhârtha, who could not

feel himself happy, until he could make others truly so.

'T was not through harted of his children
sweet,

'T was not through hatred of his loving wife.
Thraller of hearts—not that he loved them

less—
But Buddhahood more, that he renounced
them all.

Thus having sacrificed his princely life with all its luxuries and enjoyments, Gautama Siddhârtha, on his way to Râjagriha, alighted from his Kanthaka, cut off his flowing hair with his sword and exchanged his royal robe for a plain cloth of the colour of the ground (ochre colour) which the Sannyâsis use to wear. He bade Chhandaka, the faithful charioteer to take home the noble mare Kanthaka and to give to King Shuddhodana the message that the prince had renounced the world. Next morning, dressed like a mendicant with a begging bowl in his hand, Siddhârtha walked along the high-road and entered the city of Râjagriha. He silently went from house to house and people offered him food. People wondered who he was and what was his mission, for his erect gait and beautiful figure betrayed his royal birth, though he was dressed like an ordinary beggar. Everybody bowed to him, and gathered around him. Thus his presence created a great commotion in the streets of the city. The attendants of King Bimbasâra brought the news

that a great *Muni* (Sage) had come to his capital and people were flocking around him as their shepherd.

The King Bimbasâra went himself to see the noble sage, and found him seated under a tree. The King greeted him with reverence and said : "The beggar's bowl does not befit thee. thy hands should take the reins of an empire. I request thee to come to my palace and share my royal power".

Shâkyamuni, who was absorbed in contemplation, lifted his eyes and looked at the King, and replied : "Thou art a good King, and thy words are prudent. But I have renounced the world in search after deliverance. How can I return to the world ? I have discovered the illusory nature of wealth and of royal power and have learnt that the fruit of holiness is better than sovereignty over the earth, than living in heaven, nay better than lordship over all the worlds. What is the preference of a dead king over a dead beggar ? I pray to thee do not try to entangle me again with the ties of the world." The King Bimbasâra reverently bowed down before Shâkya Muni and said : "Mayest thou obtain what thou seekest and having attained it mayest thou receive me as thy humble disciple".

Shâkya Muni Bodhisattva parted from Bimbasâra as a friend and went out of Râjagriha, the capital of Magadha, in search of a remedy for misery, sorrow, disease and death which prevailed in the

world. He went to Vaishâli and placed himself under the spiritual guidance of a great Brâhmin philosopher Ârâda-Kalama who had a large number of followers. He belonged to the Sâmkhya school of Kapila and laid great stress on the belief in a permanent and eternal soul, the Âtman. Bodhisattva sat at his feet and listened to the doctrine of Âtman which is the ego or 'I' and the doer of all doings. Ârâda urged that the belief in an eternal immaterial soul (Âtman) is the only way to salvation or freedom from bondage. Like the *Munja* grass when separated from its thorny case or like the wild bird when freed from its cage in which it is imprisoned, the soul (Âtman) when freed from the limitations (upâdhi) would attain perfect deliverance (mukti). When the ego realized its immaterial nature it would become free and perfect. Ârâda reasoned this way : What is that Âtman which perceives the world of touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing ? The Âtman is the 'I', who sees, hears, feels, etc. This 'I' is the permanent reality. True religion teaches how to liberate this 'I' or ego or Âtman through the path of purification. The life of a hermit depending entirely on alms for food is the best means for the purification of the heart. It should also be attended with the abandonment of all desires and the realization of the emptiness or nonexistence of matter. Through this path the goal of perfect freedom and immortal life is reached.

Bodhisattva found no satisfaction in this doctrine, because he realized that people were in bondage on account of this illusory sense of 'I' which was the source of all evil. Also because he realized that if the qualities of 'I' or Atman were stripped off and removed, the very existence of 'I' or Atman would disappear, for the thing and its quality are different in our thought only but not in reality. If the quality of heat, which is separate from fire in our thought only, be removed from the thing fire, then fire will be non-existent. That which men call Atman, the ego or 'I' is not an entity separate from its qualities or thought, understanding, sensation, disposition etc. When the thought of 'I', which stands between our rational nature and truth, is banished, the real thing can be seen. Bodhisattva then left Ārāda-Kalama and placed himself under the guidance of another Brāhmin teacher Udraka Rāmaputra who belonged to the Vaisheshika school of Kanāda. He also expounded the theory of a permanent 'I', ego or Atman, but laid greater stress on the law of karma and transmigration of souls.

Bodhisattva accepted the truth of the law of karma but could not believe in the existence of a permanent soul which transmigrates. After deep meditation Bodhisattva discovered for himself the truth about the problems of karma and transmigration and said: "The law of karma is undeniable. What we sow we shall reap and what we reap in

this life we must have sown in our previous lives. But I see no transmigration of the 'I'. My personality : 'I am so and so is made up of qualities that sprang into being as a result of a combination both mental and material (*skandhas*) by the proces of a gradual evolution. I have acquired five roots of sense perception in my organism from ancestors who performed the same fuctions and the ideas, which I have now, were acquired partly from others, who thought them, and partly they rise from combination of those ideas in my own mind. They are my ancestors in the same senses as I of yesterday am the father of I of today. There is rebirth but not the transmigration of 'I', ego or Âtman which is an illusion."

Bodhisattva found no satisfaction in Udraka's teaching and quitted him. Then he went to the temple priest, but his gentle and compassionate heart was horrified at the sight of cruel sacrifice of innocent animals on the altars of gods for the expiation of sins. He exclaimed : "It is horrible to propitiate gods by shedding the blood of the innocent animals. Can a new wrong expiate old wrongs ? How can the slaughter of a harmless victim take away the sins of another man ? There is no truth in such a religion." Bodhisattva now realized that non-killing (Ahimsa) was the best of all religions ; that rituals and prayers were useless and incantations of mantras had no saving power. But the right sacrifice was the relinquishment of

lust, covetousness, and evil passions, and to give up all hatred and ill will was the true worship.

Thus dissatisfied Bodhisattva went in search of a better system towards Urvela, modern Bodh-Gayâ. There in the jungle of Urvela he met five Bhikkus, headed by Kaundinya, who were pupils of Udraka. These five ascetics were practising severe austerities (*tapas*) and penance to check their senses and subdue their passions. Bodhisattva admired their zeal and earnestness, and joined their company. He gave himself up to mortification and contemplation. In the practice of severe penances, Bodhisattva excelled them in every way, and, therefore, he was revered by them as their master. For long years he continued to torture his body without food and clothes, living under trees in pouring rain and in tropical sun-shine without having any shelter overhead. Thus suppressing the wants of nature, he devoted himself to meditation and other exercises of the most rigorous ascetic Yogi. For a long time he ate each day only one grain of barley or millet. At the end of this long struggle, Bodhisattva's body was reduced to a skeleton and became shrunken like a withered branch. His body was so attenuated that when he touched his belly he could feel his backbone. The fame of his asceticism and holiness spread in the surrounding villages and people came from great distances to see him and receive his blessings.

But the holy one was not satisfied, when he

found that by self-mortification his body became weaker every day, still in his mind he could not find peace of salvation. He discovered that extreme penance was not the right path, and then he resolved that he should strengthen his body by food and drink, and make it fit for further struggle until the goal was reached.

With this resolution in his mind Bodhisattva went to bathe in the river Nairanjanâ (modern Falgue). But he was so weak that he fell down, when he strove to get out of the water. Finding a branch of a tree nearby, he took hold of it and raised himself up, and left the water. But he could not walk back to his abode. He staggered, and fell to the ground, and was unconscious. The five ascetic companions thought that Shâkya Muni was dead. At this time Sujâtâ, the daughter of a chief herdsman, living near the woods, happened to pass by the spot, where Bodhisattva had swooned. It was she who saved the life of the Blessed One, by offering him rice-milk, which the Blessed One accepted. After he had eaten some of Sujâtâ's rice-milk he felt refreshed, and his mind became clear again. Now he felt strong enough to struggle further for the highest enlightenment. From this time he gave up fasting and other extreme methods of asceticism. The five Bhikkus, seeing this change in their master's practice, lost their confidence, and turned away from him. When Bodhisattva wandered on alone, the Bhikkus exclaimed :

"Siddhârtha leaves us to seek a more pleasant abode."

But the Blessed One was determined to continue his search after Truth by following the middle path. He went under the shade of the Bodhi tree, and sat down alone in deep meditation.

At this time Maro Papima⁴, the lord of the *five desires and of death*, and the greatest enemy of Truth came with his three daughters and a host of evil spirits, to tempt the Holy One. But the Blessed One remained calm and feared him not.

"Then fell the night even as our Master sate
Under that Tree. But he who is the Prince
Of Darkness, Mâra—knowing this was Buddh
Who should deliver men, and now the hour
When he should find the Truth and save
the worlds—

Gave unto all his evil powers command.
Wherefore there trooped from every deepest pit
The fiends who war with Wisdom and the
Light,

Arati, Trishnâ, Râga, and their crew
Of passions, horrors, ignorances, lusts,
The brood of gloom and dread ; all hating
Buddh,

Seeking to shake his mind ; nor knoweth one
Not even the wisest, how those fiends of Hell

4. Maro Papima, which corresponds to the Mrityuh Pâpima of the Vedas, —the god of desire and death. The Tempter of Nachiketâ of the *Katha Upanishad* may be compared to the Tempter, Mâra of Bodhisattva Gautama.

Battled that night to keep the Truth from
Buddh :

stars shot from heaven,
The solid earth shuddered as if one laid
Flame to her gaping wounds ; the torn black air
Was full of whistling wings, of screams and yells,
Of evil faces peering, of vast fronts
Terrible and majestic, Lords of Hell
Who from a thousand Limbos led their troops
To tempt the Master,

But Buddh heeded not.⁵

Having conquered Mâra and his attendants, Prince Siddhârtha sat cross-legged under the Bo-Tree on the banks of the Nairanjanâ river, in Bodh Gayâ, with a firm determination in his mind to search after the truth, and find the remedy for sorrow, suffering, disease and death, which the whole world was suffering from.

He exclaimed : "On this spot, let my body lie, dried up ; let the flesh, bones and skin be dissolved into atoms ; still, without attaining the precious Bodhi, (the highest spiritual enlightenment), which can hardly be acquired even after struggling for ages, I shall not move an inch and this is my firm determination."

The religion which he established and preached, depended upon the four noble truths which lead to Nirvâna, the cessation of all sorrow, suffering, misery, disease, birth and death.

5. Cf. *The Light of Asia*, PP. 157-165.

The first noble truth is the existence of suffering and sorrow in the world. Buddha said : "Birth is attended with pain, growth is sorrowful, and decay is painful. Illness is sorrowful, and death is sorrowful. Sad it is to be joined to that which we do not like. Sadder still is the separation from that which we love and painful is the craving for that which cannot be obtained."

The second noble truth is the cause of suffering. Buddha said : "The cause of suffering is lust. The surrounding world affects sensation, and begets a craving thirst which clamours for immediate satisfaction. Verily it is the thirst (or craving), causing the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight-seeking satisfaction, now here, now there ; that is to say that the craving for the gratification of the passions, or the craving for a future life, or the craving for success in the present life. The desire to live for the enjoyment of self entangles us in the net of sorrow. Pleasures are the bait and the result is pain."

The third noble truth is cessation of sorrow, which is meant by the word, Nirvâna. "He who conquers self is free from lust. He no longer craves ; the flame of desire finds no material to feed upon." Here you will notice that desire was compared to a flame. When that flame of desire and lust is extinguished, the state of Nirvâna is reached.

This can be accomplished by following the

fourth noble truth, which is the eight-fold path that leads to Nirvâna. The eight-fold path is : (1) right comprehension ; (2) right resolutions ; (3) right speech ; (4) right acts ; (5) right way of earning a livelihood ; (6) right efforts ; (7) right thoughts ; (8) right state of peaceful mind ; that is the Dharma ; that is the truth ; this is the religion. These four great truths which gave foundation to his religion, Buddha preached among the masses.

After attaining to Buddhahood, he remained in solitude for forty-nine days, enjoying the bliss of emancipation. Buddha was again tempted by Mâra, who came and stood beside him, and addressed him, saying : "Pass away now, Lord, from existence ! Now is the time for the Blessed One to pass away !" But Buddha replied : "I shall not die, O Evil One, until not only the brethren and sisters of the order, but also the lay-disciples of both sexes shall have become true hearers, wise and well-trained, ready and learned, versed in the scriptures, fulfilling all the greater and lesser duties, correct in life, walking according to the precepts, until they, having thus themselves learned the doctrine, shall be able to give information to others concerning it, preach it, make it known, establish it, open it, minutely explain it, and make it clear, until they, when others start vain doctrines, shall be able to vanquish and refute them, and so, to spread the wonder-working truth abroad ! I shall not die, until the pure

religion of truth shall have become successful, prosperous, widespread and popular in all its full extent, until, in a word, it shall have been well proclaimed among men !”

“Thus three times did Mâra approach me in former years. And now, Ânanda, Mâra, the Evil One, came again today to the place where I was, and standing beside me, addressed me in the same words : ‘Pass away, Lord, from existence.’ And when he had thus spoken Ânanda, I answered him and said : ‘Make thyself happy ; the final extinction of the Tathâgata shall take place before long.”⁶

The Tathâgata has found the middle path. “Neither abstinence from fish or flesh, nor going naked, nor shaving the head, nor wearing matted hair, nor dressing in a rough garment, nor covering oneself with dirt, nor sacrificing to Agni, will cleanse a man who is not free from delusions.

“Anger, drunkenness, obstinacy, bigotry, deception, envy, self-praise, disparaging others, superciliousness and evil intentions constitute uncleanness ; not verily the eating of flesh.

“Let me teach you, O Bhikkus, the middle path, which keeps aloof from both extremes. By suffering, the emaciated devotee produces confusion, and sickly thoughts in his mind. Mortification is not conducive even to worldly knowledge ; how much less to a triumph over the senses !

“He who fills his lamp with water, will not

6. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, PP. 208-209.

dispel the darkness, and he who tries to light a fire with rotten wood, will fail.

"Mortifications are painful, vain, and profitless. And how can anyone be free from self by leading a wretched life, if he does not succeed in quenching the fires of lust.

"All mortification is vain, so long as self remains, and so long as self continues to lust after either worldly or heavenly pleasures. But he, in whom self has become extinct, is free from lust ; he will desire neither worldly nor heavenly pleasures, and the satisfaction of his natural wants will not defile him. Let him eat and drink according to the needs of the body.

Water surrounds the lotus-flower, but does not wet its petals.

On the other hand, sensuality of all kind is enervating. The sensual man is a slave and his passions, and pleasure-seeking is degrading and vulgar.

But to satisfy the necessities of life is not evil. To keep the body in good health is a duty, for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom and keep our mind strong and clear.

"This is the middle path, O Bhiksus, that keeps aloof from both extremes."⁷

Buddha then went to the deer park at Banaras to preach the gospel of truth, and he gained many followers. Whoever came into contact with the

7. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, PP. 39-40.

blessed conqueror of Mâra and heard his words of wisdom, took refuge with his teachings and became his disciple.

Buddha said : "Wide open be the doors of immortality to all who have ears to hear. May they receive the Dharma with faith."⁸ He preached the middle path which keeps aloof from mortification and sensuality.

Buddha said to his disciples : "Happy is he who has overcome all selfishness ; happy is he who has attained peace ; happy is he who has found the truth.

"The truth is noble and sweet ; the truth can deliver you from evil. There is no saviour in the world except the truth."⁹

He preached many sermons, and spoke to all in these words : "Here is no distress and no tribulations. Come to me and I will teach you the truth and the truth will dispel your sorrows."¹⁰

His teachings regarding charity, morality and compassion for all creatures are unparalleled :

The charitable man is loved by all ; his friendship is prized highly ; in death his heart is at rest and full of joy, for he suffers not from repentance ; he receives the opening flower of his reward and the fruit that ripens from it.

Hard it is to understand : by giving away our food, we get more strength, by bestowing clothing

8. *Cf. Ibid.*, P. 36.

9. *Ibid.*, P. 42.

10. *Ibid.*, P. 45.

on others we gain more beauty ; by founding abodes of purity and truth, we acquire great treasures.

There is a proper time and a proper mode in charity ; just as the vigorous warrior goes to battle, so is the man who is able to give. He is like an able warrior, a champion, strong and wise in action.

Loving and compassionate, he gives with reverence, and banishes all hatred, envy and anger.

"The charitable man has found the path of salvation. He is like the man who plants a sapling, securing there thereby shade, the flowers and the fruit in future years. Even so is the result of charity, even so is the joy of him who helps those that are in need of assistance ; even so is the great Nirvâna."¹¹

Buddha preached renunciation and non-attachment, and spoke in parables :

"He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me." In those who harbour such thoughts, hatred will never cease.

For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time ; hatred ceases by love ; this is an old rule.

The world does not know that we must all come to an end here ; but those who know it, their quarrels cease at once.

He who lives looking for pleasures only, his senses uncontrolled, immoderate in his food, idle

11. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, PP. 63-64.

and weak, Mâra (the tempter) will certainly overthrow him, as the wind throws down a weak tree.¹²

The evil-doer mourns in this world and he mourns in the next ; he mourns in both. He mourns and suffers when he sees the evil (result) of his own work.

The virtuous man delights in this world, and he delights in the next ; he delights in both. He delights and rejoices, when he sees the purity of his own work.

The virtuous man is happy in this world, and he is happy in the next ; he is happy in both. He is happy, when he thinks of the good he has done ; he is still more happy when going on the good path."¹³

Fools follow after vanity, so also men of evil design. The wise man keeps earnestness as his best jewel.

Follow not after vanity, nor after the enjoyments of love and lust. He who is earnest and meditative, obtains ample joy.¹⁴

"Those who bridle their mind which travels far ; moves about alone ; is without a body and hides in the chamber of the heart, will be free from the bonds of Mâra the tempter."¹⁵

If one man conquer in battle, a thousand times a

12. Cf. *dhannapada*, P. 7, Verses 3, 5, 6, 7.

13. Cf. *Dhammapada*, P. 7, Verses 15, 16, 18.

14. Cf. *Ibid.*, P. 10, Verses 29&27.

15. Cf. *Ibid.*, P. 12, Verse 37,

thousand men, and if another conquer himself, he is the greatest of conquerors."¹⁶

Parable of the Lost Son.

"There was a householder's son who went away into a distant country, and while the father accumulated immeasurable riches, the son became miserably poor. And the son, while in search of food and clothing, happened to come to the country, in which his father lived. And the father saw him in his wretchedness, for he was ragged and brutalized by poverty, and ordered some of his servants to call him.

When the son saw the palace, to which he was conducted, he thought: "I must have evoked the suspicion of a powerful man, and he will throw me into prison." Full of apprehension he made his escape before he had seen his father.

Then the father sent messengers out after his son, and he was caught and brought back in spite of his cries and lamentations. And his father ordered the servants to deal tenderly with his son, and he appointed a labourer of his son's rank and education, to employ the lad as a help-mate on the estate. And the son was pleased with his new situation.

From a window of his palace, the father watched his boy, and when he saw that he was honest and industrious, he promoted him higher and higher.

After many years, he summoned his son, and

16. Cf. *Dhammapāda* p. 31, verse 103.

called together all his servants, and made the secret known to them. Then the poor man was exceedingly glad, and he was full of joy at meeting his father.

Little by little, must the minds of men be trained for higher truths."¹⁷

The Parable of Buddha the Sower :

Bharadvâja, a wealthy Brâhmin, was celebrating his harvest thanksgiving, when the Blessed One came with his alms-bowl, begging for food.

Some of the people paid him reverence, but the Brâhmin was angry and said : "O Shramana, it would suit you better to go to work than to go to begging, I plough and sow, and having ploughed and sown, I eat. If you did likewise, you, too, would have to eat."

And the Tathâgata answered him and said : "O Brâhmin, I, too, plough and sow, and having ploughed and sown, I eat."

"Do you profess to be a husbandman ?" replied the Brâhmin. "Where then, are your bullocks ? Where is the seed and the plough ?"

The Blessed One said : "Faith is the seed I sow ; good works are the rain that fertilizes it ; wisdom and modesty are the plough ; my mind is the guiding rein ; I lay hold of the handle of the law ; earnestness is the goad I use ; and exertion is my draught-ox. This ploughing is ploughed to destroy the weeds of illusion. The harvest it yields

17. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, p. 160.

is the immortal life of Nirvâna, and thus all sorrow ends."

Then the Brâhmin poured rice-milk into a golden bowl, and offered it to the Blessed One saying: "Let the teacher of mankind partake of the rice-milk, for the venerable Gautama ploughs a ploughing that bears the fruit of immortality."¹⁸

Parable of the Woman at the Well :

Ânanda, the favourite disciple of Buddha, having been sent by the Lord on a mission, passed by a well near a village and seeing Prakriti, a girl of the Mâtanga caste, he asked her for water to drink.

Prakriti said: "O Brâhmin, I am too humble and mean to give you water to drink, do not ask any service of me lest your holiness be contaminated, for I am of low caste."

And Ânanda replied; "I ask not for caste but for water," and the Mâtanga girl's heart leaped joyfully and she gave Ânanda to drink.

Ânanda thanked her and went away; but she followed him at a distance.

Having heard that Ânanda was a disciple of Gautama Shâkyamuni, the girl repaired to the Blessed One and cried: "O Lord help me and let me live in the place where Ânanda thy disciple dwells, so that I may see him and minister unto him, for I love Ânanda."

And the Blessed One understood the emotions of her heart, and he said: "Prakriti, thy heart is

18. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, p. 173.

full of love, but you do not understand your own sentiments. It is not Ânanda whom you love, but his kindness. Receive, then, the kindness you have seen him practise unto you, and in the humility of your station practise it unto others."

Verily there is great merit in the generosity of a king, when he is kind to a slave ; but there is greater merit in the slave when ignoring the wrongs which he suffers, he cherishes kindness and goodwill to all mankind. He will cease to hate his oppressors, and even when powerless to resist their usurpation will, with compassion, pity their arrogance and supercilious demeanour.

"Blessed art thou, Prakriti, for though you are a Mâtanga, you will be a model for noblemen and noblewomen. You are of low caste, but Brâhmans will learn a lesson from you. Swerve not from the path of justice and righteousness, and you will outshine the royal glory of queens on the throne."¹⁹

Parable of the Marriage Feast in Jâmbunada.

There was a man in Jâmbunada who was to be married the next day, and he thought: "Might Buddha, the Blessed One, be present at the wedding."

And the Blessed One passed by his house and met him, and when he read the silent wish in the heart of the bridegroom, he consented to enter.

When the Holy One appeared with the retinue of his many Bhikshus, the host, whose means were

19. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, pp. 174-175.

limited, received them as best he could saying : "Eat my Lord, and all your congregation according to your desire."

While the holy men ate, the meats and drinks remained undiminished, and the host thought to himself : "How wondrous is this. I should have had plenty for all my relatives and friends. Would that I had invited them all."

When this thought was in the host's mind, all his relatives and friends entered the house ; and although the hall in the house was small there was room in it for all of them. They sat down at the table and ate, and there was more than enough for all of them.

The Blessed One was pleased to see so many guests full of good cheer, and he quickened them and gladdened them with words of truth, proclaiming the bliss of righteousness.

"The greatest happiness which a mortal man can imagine, is the bond of marriage that ties together two loving hearts. But there is a greater happiness still, and it is the embrace of truth. Death will separate husband and wife, but death will never affect him who has espoused the truth."

Therefore be married unto the truth, and live with the truth in holy wedlock. The husband, who loves his wife and desires for a union that shall be everlasting, must be faithful to her so as to be like truth itself, and she will rely upon him, and revere him, and minister unto him. And the wife,

who loves her husband and desires for a union that shall be everlasting, must be faithful to him so as to be like truth itself, and he will place his trust in her, he will honour her, he will provide for her. Verily I say unto you, their wedlock will be holiness and bliss, and their children will become like unto their parents, and will bear witness to their happiness.

"Let no man be single ; let everyone be wedded in holy love to the truth. And when Mâra, the destroyer, comes to separate the visible forms of your being, you will continue to live in the truth and you will partake of the life everlasting, for the truth is immortal."

There was no one among the guests, but was strengthened in his spiritual life, and recognized the sweetness of a life of righteousness ; and they took refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.²⁰

During the forty-five years of his public life, from the time of his proclaiming this new religion, Buddha preached these noble truths amongst the masses ; converted them by hundreds, made them belong to his new order. His new order did not recognize the distinctions of caste or creed. Kings and beggars, the rich and the poor, sages and sinners, Brâhmins and Pariahs, all joined the order and hailed Buddha, as their leader and rejoicingly followed the path, laid out by him.

20. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, pp. 180-128.

It was Buddha who, for the first time in the religious history of the world, established and organized the monastic life of purity and chastity among his disciples. When the fame of Buddha as the Saviour reached its zenith, his aged father, his wife and son and his other relatives became his disciples, joined his order, and followed his instructions. His wife Yashodharâ became the first of the nuns of the Buddhistic Order, and his son Râhula became one of the great leaders among his disciple monks. Buddha left thousands of lay disciples who lived the life of virtuous householders, strictly obeying the Dharma or the ethical laws of this new religion and recognizing Buddha as the saviour of the world.

Buddha taught his lay disciples to obey and honour their parents and to follow an honourable trade or profession. The duties and relation of children and parents, of husbands and wives, of friends and companions, of masters and servants, of pupils and teachers, of laymen and devotees, which were laid down by Buddha, were in perfect harmony with the injunctions of the ancient ethical teachings of Vedânta.

He taught : "Hatred is not conquered by hatred, but by love. This is the eternal law." "Let one overcome anger by love, evil by good ; the avaricious by generosity and the liar by truth." Such was the religion of benevolence and love preached by Buddha, the Hindu teacher, nearly five centuries

before Jesus the Christ was born. These great truths were also illustrated by stories and parables, some of which have been quoted in foregoing pages.

THE GOAL

And the Blessed One thus addressed the Bhikshus :

"It is not through understanding and grasping the four noble truths, O Bhikshus, that we have had to run so long and to wander in this weary path of transmigration, both you and I.

The soul migrates through all forms, from the stone, through plants and all kinds of animal bodies, through men of various characters, until it reaches perfect enlightenment in the Buddha.

All creatures are what they are through the karma of their deeds, done in former and in present existences.

The rational nature of man is the spark of enlightenment, which however, once procured, will remain a lasting possession. But new births are required to insure a transmigration to the summit of existence, where the unmeasurable light is gained which is the source of all righteousness.

Having attained this higher birth, I have found the truth and taught you the noble path that leads to the glad city of peace.

I have shown you the way to the Lake of Ambrosia, which washes away all sin.

I have given you the refreshing drink, called the perception of truth, and he who drinks it, becomes free from excitement, passion, and wrong-doing.

The very gods envy the bliss of him who has escaped from the floods of passion and has climbed the shores of Nirvâna. His heart is cleansed from all defilement and free from all illusion.

He is like unto the lotus which grows in the water, yet not a drop of water adheres to its petals.

The man who walks in the noble path lives in the world, and yet his heart is not defiled by worldly desires.

As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her son, her only son, so he cultivates good-will without measure among all beings.

Let a man remain steadfastly in this state of mind, whether he is standing or walking, awake or asleep, suffering from sickness, or enjoying good health, living or dying : for this state of heart is the best in the world.

He who does not see the four noble truths, has still a long path to traverse by repeated births, through the desert of ignorance with its mirages of illusion and through the morasses of sin.

But now they are grasped, the cause of further migrations and aberrations is removed. The goal is reached. The craving of selfishness is destroyed and the truth is attained.

"This is true deliverance, this is salvation ; this is heaven and the bliss of a life immortal."²¹

The religion of Buddha, like the ancient laws of the ascetic life of the Hindus, was based upon the idea of self-culture and self-restraint. On the eve of his death, Buddha recapitulated the entire system of self-culture under seven heads. They are known as the Seven Jewels of the Buddhist Law. They are as follows :

(1) Four earnest meditations ; i. e., the meditations on the body, sensations, the ideas and the reason.

(2) The four-fold great struggle against sin, that is, the struggle to prevent sinfulness ; the struggle to control the sinful states which have arisen ; the struggle to be good and the struggle to increase goodness.

(3) The four roads to saintship ; that is, the four means, viz., the will, the exertion, the preparation and the investigation, by which *siddhi* or saintly supernatural powers can be acquired.

(4) The five moral powers.

(5) The five organs of spiritual sense, viz., faith, energy, thought, contemplation and wisdom.

(6) The seven kinds of wisdom were energy, thought, contemplation, investigation, joy, repose, and serenity.

(7) There is noble eight-fold path. A critical examination will show that these seven jewels of

21. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, pp. 98-99.

the Buddhist Law are included in the eight steps of Râja Yoga, which a student of Vedânta practises.

Buddha forbade his disciples to perform miracles. When Shâriputra replied :

An ordained disciple must not commit any unchaste act. The disciple who commits an unchaste act, is no longer a disciple of the Shâkyamuni.

Again an ordained disciple must not take except what has been given him. The disciple who takes, be it so little as a penny's worth, is no longer a disciple of the Shâkyamuni.

And lastly, an ordained disciple must not knowingly and malignantly deprive any harmless creature of life, not even an earthworm or an ant. The disciple who knowingly and malignantly deprives any harmless creature of its life, is no longer a disciple of the Shâkyamuni.²²

These are the three great prohibitions.

Buddha added : "There is another great prohibition which I proclaim to you.

An ordained disciple must not boast of any superhuman perfection. The disciple who with evil intent and from covetousness boasts of a superhuman perfection, be it celestial visions or miracles, is no longer a disciple of Shâkyamuni.²³

Buddha gave these five commandments :

1. Do not kill any living being.

22. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, pp. 100-101.

23. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, p. 101.

2. Do not take what is not given to you.
3. Do not speak falsehoods.
4. Do not drink intoxicating drinks.
5. Do not commit adultery.

Buddha forbade his disciples to be engaged in star-gazing, etc.

Star-gazing and astrology, forecasting lucky or infortunate events by signs, prognosticating good or evil, all these things are forbidden.

He who lets the heart go loose without restraint shall not attain Nirvâna ; therefore, must we hold the heart in check, and retire from worldly excitements and seek tranquility of mind.

Eat your food to satisfy your hunger, and drink to satisfy your thirst. Satisfy the necessities of life like the butterfly that sips the flower, without desroying its fragrance or its texture.

It is through not understanding and grasping the four truths, O breatheren, that we have gone astray so long, and wandered in this weary path of transmigration, both you and I, until we have found the truth.

Practise the earnest meditations I have taught you. Continue in the great struggle against sin. Walk steadily in the roads of saintship. Be strong in moral powers. Let the organs of your spiritual sense be quick. When the seven kinds of wisdom enlighten your mind, you will find the noble, eightfold path that leads to Nirvâna.

Behold, O breatheren, the final extinction of the Tathâgata will take place before long. I now exhort you, saying : "All component things must

grow old and be dissolved again. Seek ye for that which is permanent, and work out your salvation with diligence.”²⁴

He then announced his death to his disciples. He ate some food prepared by Chandaka, a man of low caste, (a worker in metals) and there fell upon him dire sickness, but the Blessed One mindful and self-possessed bore it without complaint and asked his disciples to come with him to Kushinagara. He asked Ânanda to spread his robe under a tree for him as he needed rest. He pardoned Chandaka, then the Blessed One perceiving that death was near, uttered these words :

“He who gives away, shall have real gain. He who subdues himself shall be free of passions. The righteous man casts off sin ; and thus by rooting out lust, bitterness and illusion, do we reach Nirvâna.”²⁵

He comforted his weeping disciples by saying “I am not the first Buddha who came upon the earth, nor shall I be the last. Gautama Siddhârtha will die, but Buddha will live, for Buddha is the Truth, and I have founded on earth the kingdom of truth, and truth cannot die. He who believes in the truth and lives it, is my disciple and I shall teach him. The truth will be propagated and the kingdom of truth will increase for about five hundred years. Then for a while the clouds of

²⁴. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, pp. 210-211.

²⁵. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, p. 215.

error will darken the light, and in due time another Buddha will arise, and he will reveal to you the selfsame eternal truth which I have taught you."

Ānanda said : "How shall we know him ?"

The Blessed One said : "The Buddha that will come after me, will be known as Maitreya, which means He whose name is kindness."²⁶

The last words of Buddha were :

"Behold now brethern. I exhort you saying, decay is inherent in all component things, but the truth will remain for ever. Work out your salvation with diligence !" This was the last word of the Tathâgata. Then the Tathâgata fell into a deep meditation, and having lost consciousness, passed peacefully away.

When the Blessed One entered Nirvâna, there arose, at his passing out of existence, a mighty earthquake, terrible and awe-inspiring and the thunders of heaven burst forth, and those of the brethern who were not yet free from passions, some stretched out their arms and wept, and some fell headlong on the ground, in anguish at the thought : "Too soon has the Blessed one died ! Too soon has the happy One passed away from existence ! Too soon has the Light of the world gone out !"²⁷

Thus ended the glorious life of Buddha, the Enlightened. His body was cremated by his followers, and his bones were kept untouched for seven

26. Cf. *The Gospel of Buddha*, pp. 217-218.

27. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

days and all the disciples and members of his order, gathered around them and paid honour, reverence, respect and homage to them with dance, song and music, and with incense, garlands of flowers and perfumes.

It is said that his remains were divided into eight portions, and were distributed among his followers in different parts of India. Mounds, stupas and temples were erected over those remains, and those were the places for worship, prayer and meditation as well as for pilgrimage. Statues of Buddha were erected and placed upon the altars over the relics, and the smaller images were placed in the shrines and chapels of the monasteries, where people used to gather to show their reverence to him as also to worship his revered memory to repeat his name and to pour forth the prayer of their souls, with the deepest feelings of devotion and love.

Buddha performed many miracles, such as resuscitating the dead, healing incurable diseases, and walking on the surface of the river Ganges, crossing that mighty current of over a mile in width. He was tempted by Mâra three times in the same manner, as was Jesus of Nazareth by Satan. But by his superhuman powers Buddha conquered Mâra, the devil or satan of Buddhism. All these miraculous deeds and marvellous superhuman powers made his disciples and followers adore, revere and worship him as the living manifestation of Divinity among them.

It is true that Buddha did not preach God, neither did he discuss the nature of the Âtman (attâ) or the individual soul, nor did he care for heaven, although his religion was purely a religion of humanity and for humanity, based entirely upon ethical laws, and although it was a religion of self-conquest and of the victory of righteousness over unrighteousness, still his disciples and followers could not help recognizing in Buddha the living manifestation of Divinity. They bowed down before him, prayed to him and reverentially repeated his name at the time of devotion, and asked for his help in time of distress, and within fifty years after his death he was deified and worshipped as the Lord of the universe, and the saviour of mankind. The human minds cannot rest content without having some direct and tangible object of worship.

As in the course of time among the Christians, Christ became not only their master and ideal, but also the living incarnation of Divinity, so among the Buddhists of the pre-Christian era, Buddha stood for their Master and Saviour, nay as the embodiment of Divinity and the Redeemer of the world.

Although Buddha's last words to his disciples were: "Be ye lamps unto yourselves: be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth and work out your own salvation." Still in course of time, the

personality of Buddha became the lamp and the refuge, the truth and the bestower of salvation.

Gradually Buddha became the first person of the Buddhistic Trinity. This trinity consists of Buddha, Dharma or the laws of this religion, and Sangha i. e., the order of the Buddhistic community, somewhat similar to the idea of the church among the Christians.

Every Buddhist, whether a monk, a nun or a householder, should in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, and at evening, salute and meditate upon this blessed Trinity, and should repeat the formula : "I take refuge in Buddha ; I take refuge in his Dharma or his teachings, and I take refuge in his order." They should never violate any of these three in thought, word or deed.

The Buddhists believe that there is no more reverent worship than that of these three honourable ones, three jewels, and that there is no higher road to perfect knowledge than meditation on the four noble truths, which I have already described.

They also say that the meaning of the truths is so profound that it is beyond the comprehension of uncultured minds, but the worship of the holy image of Buddha is practicable for all. Furthermore they say, that though the great teacher has entered Nirvâna, yet his image exists, and we should worship it with zeal as though in his very presence.

The Buddhists believe that those who constantly offer flowers and burn incense before the holy image

of Buddha, are enabled to purify their thoughts, and those who perpetually bathe his holy image, are enabled to overcome their sins. Those who devote themselves to this work, receive invisible rewards, and those who advise others to perform it, are doing good to themselves as well as to others, therefore it is desired by the Buddhists that those who wish to accumulate religious merit, should set their minds on performing these deeds.

The four noble truths, however, were not Introduced by Buddha for the first time. At least two centuries before his advent, Kapila, the founder of the Sâmkhya school of philosophy and father of the evolution theory in India, inculcated the same truths in the same manner, showing that there is suffering in the world, tracing its cause to lust and desire, describing that deliverance from all kinds of suffering, misery, birth and death, is the highest ideal of life, and in the end pointing out the path which leads to such emancipation.

The religion of Buddha may, therefore, be said to be an outgrowth of the Sâmkhya system. As Kapila denied the existence of a personal God, who is called the creator and governor of the universe, so did Buddha. Buddha was the greatest free-thinker and religious reformer of his time. He rejected the authority of the scriptures, stood against priest-craft, the caste system and other social evils that prevailed at that time, denounced animal sacrifices as inhuman, and disdained worship and devotion to God, and

ridiculed prayers as useless and unnecessary. He avoided philosophical discussion and metaphysical debates. His sole aim was to see his followers walking in the path of righteousness, obtaining control and mastery over passions and desires, and thus escaping the law of karma and reaching the destination of Nirvâna, the cessation of birth, sorrow, suffering, disease and death. When asked by his disciples what the state of Nirvâna was like, whether it was a positive or negative state, Buddha said : "There is, Oh disciple, a state where there is neither earth nor water, neither light nor air, neither infinity of space nor infinity of reason, nor absolute void, nor the extinction of perception and non perception, neither this world nor that world, both sun and moon. That, Oh disciple, I term neither coming nor going nor standing, neither death nor birth. It is without basis, without procession, without cessation, that is the end of sorrow—that is Nirvâna".

Can ordinary minds grasp what Buddha meant by such a state ? The keenest intellect and subtlest understanding of a philosopher fail to comprehend the meaning. Even the mind of the most advanced disciples of Buddha, were staggered and confounded many a time, in their attempts to get a clear conception of this state of Nirvâna, the highest ideal of Buddhism. Some of his followers thought that it must be the state of absolute negation ; others belived it to be the total annihilation of every thing

that exists in the universe. Some of them understood that it was a state of perfect void, and others maintained that it was absolute non-existence or destruction of self.

After the death of Buddha and his direct disciples, the difficulty of understanding what he meant by Nirvâna, was felt more keenly by his later followers than ever before. There arose four schools of Buddhistic philosophies.

The first was of the extreme nihilists. They interpreted Nirvâna as the realization of the utter emptiness of the world and of the blissful nothingness and extinction which was considered the highest end and aim of life, while the other three schools believed that he meant the annihilation of self, and of the universe, and the permanent abiding of abstract thought in itself. These Buddhists maintained the permanence of abstract thought, but not of any thinker. The idea of ego-entity as permanent was considered by them to be an illusion. Here we shall not forget that Buddha kept perfect silence about the question whether or not the individual soul was permanent. This reticence created more confusion in the minds of his followers, and gave them ample opportunity to indulge in all kinds of guess-work. The great problem however, as to whether Buddha's idea of Nirvâna was a positive or a negative state has remained undecided to the present day, even among the Buddhists themselves.

The story of Agnosticism and Nihilism of the Buddhist philosophers of the fifth and sixth centuries after Christ swept away from the minds of the people, the idea of a supreme Being of the universe, who is the omnipotent creator and omniscient ruler of all phenomena, as well as the idea of an immortal and indestructible soul-entity which remains after the death of the body, and reincarnates, enjoys or suffers, and reaps the fruits of works and attain in the end, a positive state of absolute bliss and happiness.

That storm ultimately produced a tremendous wave of reaction in the ocean of religious thought of India, and resulted in the revival of the more rational philosophy and religion of Vedânta, through the wonderful powers of logic and reasoning and ability of Sankarâchârya the greatest exponent and commentator of the Vedânta philosophy, who lived in the 7th century, A. D. He has been recognized in India, as the embodiment of divine wisdom, and the personification, as it were, of true philosophy and logic. His reasoning and arguments have been greatly appreciated in the West by such philosophers as Schopenhauer and Deussen, and scholars like Prof. Max Mueller. It was he who gave a death blow to Buddhism in India, by pointing out the falacies and errors in the Buddhistic philosophy. Thus he saved India from demoralization and spiritual degeneration which were brought about by the corrupted agnosticism, atheism and nihilism of

the Buddhistic philosophers of the 6th century A. D.

From that time, Buddhism, after reigning in India for nearly 1000 years, gradually disappeared, and it was driven out of the land of its birth, and was forced to live outside of India among the peoples of such countries as China, Japan, Tibet, Burma and Ceylon, where there was neither any philosophy nor any religion based upon the higher principles.

Since the time of this great revival of Vedântic thought which began in the 7th century A. D., the religion of the Hindus has been re-established upon the rational and truly philosophical doctrines of Vedânta. Through the teachings of Vedânta, the spiritual aspirations for divine communion of a permanent and immortal individual soul, have once more found their way towards a satisfactory fulfilment. The Godless philosophy and the soulless psychology of Buddhism, have been supplanted by that sublime philosophy which standing upon the rock of immutable truth, declares that the beginning, middle and end of the phenomenal universe is the all-pervading and omniscient Divinity, which dwells in every being, which is the soul of our souls, in which we live, through which we exist and without which there would be and could be nothing. That Divinity is called in Vedânta the Brahman, the Esserence of all existence the infinite source of intelligence, and the indestructible basis of

life and consciousness as well as the abode of eternal happiness, where there is neither sorrow, suffering nor death. Buddhism denies the existence of a permanent soul-entity (attâ) which we designate as doer, agent, thinker and enjoyer, which is subject to birth and rebirth. According to Buddhistic psychology, there is not any being that is born, that acts, thinks, enjoys and suffers. But birth, action, thought, enjoyment and suffering take place. Man's soul consists of sensations, impression, idea, memory-forms, thought-forms and deed-forms. It reminds one of the similar conclusion arrived at by the nihilistic Scotch philosopher, David Hume, of the 18th century.

Buddhism teaches the rebirth of the karma i. e., of the character of thought-forms and deed-forms, but it denies that reincarnation of the soul-entity of the being who is the thinker and the actor which has been so logically established by the Vedânta philosophy. The Buddhistic writers say that when a living being dies, a new being is produced according to the karma or deeds of the being that is dead, and they often compare the relation of one life to the next as that of the flame of a lamp to the flame of another lighted by it. Vedânta refutes the idea of rebirth by saying that if there were no permanent soul-entity the ever-changing impressions, ideas etc., will never be held together in such a harmonious way. If there were no actor or sufferer, how can there be a permanent seeker after Nirvâna or

salvation from suffering? And where will be the identity of the man who suffers with the man who is dead, if there is no soul?

The nihilistic teachings of Buddhism can be summed up in four lines:

Misery only doth exist, none miserable.

No doer is there; naught save the dead is found.

Nirvana is, but not the man who seeks it.

The path exists, but not the traveller on it.

Vedânta, on the contrary, teaches that the soul or ego is the door, actor, thinker, sufferer, seeker after peace and bliss. It is like the permanent thread which connects the thought-forms, memory-forms, sensations, ideas, feelings and harmoniously brings them together and keeps them in their proper places. It is the same ego that suffers, seeks also the cessation of sorrow and misery. It is the same individual soul that appears as born, continues to exist after death and reincarnates in another form. This is the most vital point, in which Vedânta differs from Buddhism. Furthermore, Vedânta teaches that the individual ego, being a reflection or image of the universal Spirit, its true nature is immortal, unchangeable and divine, nay, one with Brahman, the supreme Being of the universe. Buddhism denies the reality of the universe, and calls it the result of illusion while Vedânta teaches that the reality of the universe is that absolute Being, the Brahman, which is the soul of our souls.

Everything and teaches that the sooner this evil ceases to exist, the better it is for us all, while Vedânta tells us to see Divinity, the absolute unchangeable Reality everywhere. When this realization comes, through the knowledge of our Divine nature, the soul attains to Nirvâna, because it then rises above all delusions, sorrow, suffering disease and death, transcends the law of karma and reincarnation and remains as perfect and one with the divine Being, the Brahman, for ever and ever.

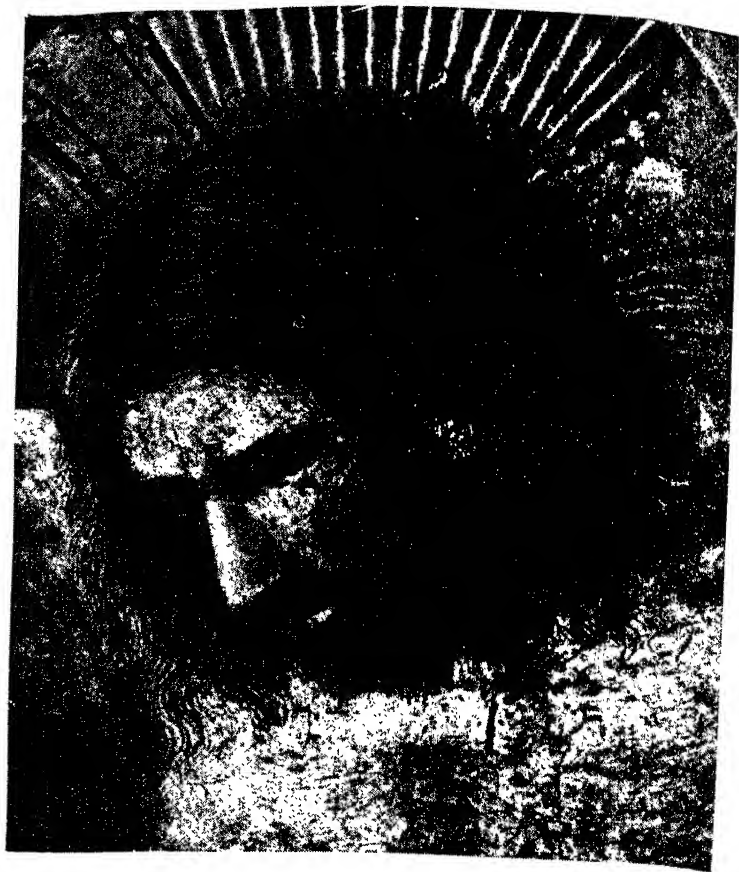
CHRIST AND HIS TEACHINGS

Jesus, the Christ is worshipped in Christendom as the incarnation of the Heavenly Father and as the greatest Saviour of mankind. It is believed that he was born on the 25th of December of a virgin mother at Bethlehem about two thousands years ago, and his birth was the fulfilment of the prophecies of old Jewish prophets and of the promise of Yahveh, the Lord of the House of Isreal. It is said that after man's first disobedience and fall from paradise, the curse of the Lord fell upon Satan in the form that 'the woman's seed shall bruise the serpent's head' and crush the power of the devil. That curse, which contained in it the indirect promise of the Lord, became in the end a great blessing to the world, and was fulfilled at the advent of the glorious Son of Man.

When Abraham went forth from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran at the command of the Lord, he received the promise from Yahveh that in his seed all nations would be blessed, and the same pledge was renewed to Isaac and Jacob, who at the time of his death declared that the Messiah should come. Moses, after delivering the law to his people, declared that a prophet like unto himself would be born from among his brethren. Balaam came to curse Israel, but he changed his curse into a blessing,

when he saw the bright morning star, that is, the Christ, rising out of Jacob. It is said that King David foretold the miraculous birth, humiliation, cruel death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. In the *Song of Songs*, again, it is supposed that there is a description of the intimate union which Christ had with his church, and it is also believed that in the *Song of Songs*, it was mentioned for the first time. Hosea predicted the return of the Son of God from Egypt and His resurrection after three days. Amos foretold the raising of the fallen tabernacle of David, and the prophet of Tekoa also predicted that the Messiah, the Son of God, would appear upon Mt. Zion. The unnatural experience of Jonah has been interpreted to symbolize the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. Micah predicted the birth of the Saviour in Bethlehem. So did Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted the coming of the Messiah upon the clouds of Heaven. And Zechariah also foretold the coronation of the Branch, the Son of David ; and Malachi predicted the advent of the forerunner and the Prince of the Lord. According to the orthodox belief, the advent of the Son of God, the divine manifestation in the form of Jesus, the Christ was the perfect fulfilment of all these promises, prophecies, and predictions.

In the fullness of time, the miraculous conception of the Virgin Mary took place, and on 25th of December was born in Bethlehem the only-begotten Son of the Heavenly Father, to deliver the world



Jesus Christ
Giotto 1266-1337

from sin and suffering and to establish the kingdom of Heaven. A special star, heralding the advent of the Lord, arose above the horizon in the east. The wise men, seeing that star, came to the spot, where the newly-born babe was resting to adore him, by addressing as the 'King of the Jews' and by offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

King Herod, after hearing all these things, was greatly troubled in his mind and with him the whole of Jerusalem, and when the King discovered that he was mocked by the wise men, whom he had ordered to bring the news of the new-born divine Child, he became extremely angry, and sent for wicked men to destroy all children in Bethlehem and all along the coast thereof from two years old and under. In the meantime, Joseph, the husband of Mary, was roused one night from sleep by an angel, through whose advice he took the young Child and His mother, and went away to Egypt, thus saving the life of the Redeemer of the world.¹ After the death of wicked king Herod, they returned to Galilee and dwelt in the City of Nazareth.

Such is the version given in Matthew, but the Luke narrator describes the decree of taxation by Caesar Augustus, the swaddling clothes, the manger, the announcement of the advent of the Lord and Saviour of the world by the angel to the

1. Similar is the story of Krishna, who was saved by Vasudeva, the husband of Devaki.

shepherds in the field, praising of the Child by Simeon and the aged prophetess Anna, and so on. In the Apocryphal Gospels, various miracles are described which were performed by Jesus, the Christ, when he was in Egypt. When Jesus was twelve years old, he displayed his divine wisdom by answering the most difficult theological questions of the learned Jewish doctors and by asking them also questions on theology. After that, what happened? We do not know. The life of Jesus, the Christ, for eighteen years is unknown to the world. We hear of him again, when he was baptized. He was baptized by one who is regarded as the incarnation of Elijah, but before this baptism, where Jesus lived and what he did during this period, is unknown, although it is thought by some that he went to India and studied there,² while others believe that Jesus, the Christ went to Egypt, Persia, or Tibet. No genuine historical proof, however, has yet been found to support those ideas.

At the time of baptism, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in bodily shape in the form of a dove over his head and a voice was heard from Heaven saying: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'. Jesus was about thirty years old at that time. Then he appeared in public, but before he appeared in public, he had returned from Jordan, and returning from

2. Vide the book, *The Unknown Life of Jesus* by Nikolas Notovitch, and *Kashmere O Tibbute* by S. Abhedānanda.

Jordan, he went into the wilderness, and there he fasted for forty days, and was tempted by the devil. Having conquered the devil, he became the Master of the world, and went to Galilee, and proclaimed his message in the synagogues, but the Jewish doctors did not receive him as their Messiah. Then he returned from Galilee to Nazareth and there he preached among the poor people, healed the sick, cast out devils, restored the sight, and hearing of the blind and deaf, resuscitated the dead, walked upon the water, and performed many miracles among his disciples and followers. Thus he proved before the world that he was the true Son of the living God. Then he entered into Jerusalem, seated on an ass's colt. There he was betrayed by one of his disciples. He instituted the memorial supper, and then he was crucified, having made a full confession of his Messiahship before Pontius Pilate. After three days he resurrected, and appeared alive before his disciples, Jesus, the Christ promised to come again upon the clouds of Heaven, to establish the Kingdom of Heaven, to raise the dead, and to give to his devoted disciples the crown of everlasting life.

Such was the career of the glorious Saviour of Nazareth. That wonderful Redeemer, who is now worshipped in the world by millions and millions of people lived such a short life—his life was not very long, but his life, as far as we know, was full of wonderful events. The wonderful character of

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that sin-atonig Son of Man has not only become the object of reverence, veneration, love, and devotion of millions and millions of people all over the world, but it has also been the source of consolation and comfort in the time of pleasure, distress, sorrow, misery, and suffering. In his name, princes have renounced their treasures, husbands have forsaken their beloved wives and wives their beloved husbands. In his name, parents have deserted their beautiful children, and children have deserted their parents.

Thousands and thousands of holy and pious souls have become martyrs for the sake of that glorious and self-abnegating Son of Man. The fire of vengeance was kindled by the zealous priests, to protect the banner of his faith, and Galileo, Giordano Bruno and others were persecuted by the priests. But what for they were persecuted? It was for protecting his religion. Scientific researches were suppressed by the priests and clergy, by fire and sword, to keep the people in ignorance and superstition, and to make them serve their selfish desires and motives. But, in spite of all these good and evil deeds, which were perpetrated in the name of Jesus, the Christ and for the sake of his religion, today we are able to get a glimpse of the truth through the help of modern science.

The light of scientific investigation has now enlightened the intellects of many, and today we are able to examine the truths, regarding those old

prophecies and predictions, and to ask whether Jesus, the Christ was a perfect fulfilment of all those old Jewish prophecies ; whether the life of Jesus, the Christ as described in the synoptic gospels, is historical or not ; whether they were the historical records or mere traditions accepted and handed down by credulous people of that age. We all know through the help of modern science and geological researches that the first appearance of man on this earth was not six thousand years ago, but in the Tertiary period more than 200,000 years ago. By taking recourse to geological calculation, what do we think of the temptation and fall of Adam today ? It is nothing but a myth. The story of temptation and fall of Adam from paradise are regarded by all scientific men as myth. Similarly the story of the deluge and Noah's ark has also been proved to be absurd and meaningless by Professor Huxley and others. They do not consider it as a real fact. We find a similar mythical story among the ancient Greeks in the story of Deucalion, and the same story existed in Persia. A story of the deluge is recorded in the Zend Avesta, and in the Chinese history you will find the narratives of deluge in their mythology. Among the Hindus the same story of deluge existed. Then, if we study the higher criticism of the Bible, what do we find ? Professor Bacon of the Yale University says that the earliest stories in Genesis were taken from the prophetic legends, because they turn to the mass of

tales and legends, which were current in the eighth or ninth century before Christ. For instance, he says regarding Abraham: "The figure of Abraham is purely and simply the type of the prehistoric Israel brought by Yahveh from a far off country in the East to inhabit the land of Canaan". Furthermore the learned Professor says that Abraham of the New Testament could not have been a historic figure. If there was not, it would be like the ideal heir of Yahveh, and this abraham existed in the minds of the Jewish Prophets and Seers, and that is Father Abraham. The higher critics of the Bible today deny that Moses gave the law to his people. They deny that Moses wrote the five books of Pentateuch. But who wrote them? Nobody knows. Through proper investigations, they have discovered the truths and the facts.

The prophecies of Balaam concerned the Judaic kingdom in the Assyrian period. It is now proved that David did not write the Psalter, and there is no reference in any psalm to the expected Messiah. The *Song of Songs* has been proved not to be an allegory of the love of Jesus, the Christ for his church, but to be an erotic poem, describing the love of a man and a woman. In fact, none of the Jewish prophets, who lived before the Babylonian exile, ever referred to the Messiah. They did not have any conception of a Messiah as the spiritual saviour of the world. The Jews never accepted such a Messiah, but they had the idea of a Messiah as an

earthly king, and not a spiritual Lord of the universe.

Hosea did not speak of the resurrection but he reproached some of his contemporaries who thought that the evils of a nation could be cured in two or three days. Probably Jonah never had such an unnatural experience. And the first conception of a Messiah as the spiritual saviour of the world we find in the Persian scriptures, the Zend Avesta. In the conception of Zoroaster, who, according to the prophets of Ahura Mazda, would come in future to destroy the evil influence of Ahriman (who was the same as Satan in Christianity), and that Messiah would come to renovate the world and to establish the kingdom of Ahura Mazda once more. These conceptions were accepted by the Parsees during the Babylonian Captivity which lasted for about fifty years from 587 to 539 B. C., but the orthodox Jews repudiated these ideas, and the Sadducees never accepted them. They thought that they were foreign, and had nothing to do with them.

As regards the time and place of the birth of Jesus, the Christ, there has been much difference of opinion. The popular belief is that Jesus, the Christ was born on the 25th of December in the reign of King Herod, when Cyrenius was Governor of Syria, and when (according to Luke) Caesar Augustus decreed the taxation of the whole world. But history tells us differently. History says that Cyrenius was not appointed to this post, until long

after the death of Herod, during whose reign, (according to Matthew) Jesus, the Christ, was born. And, again, the taxing which is mentioned in Luke, did not take place, until ten years after the time mentioned, and therefore Eusebius, first of the ecclesiastical historians, places the date of the birth of Jesus, the Christ in 10 A. D., ten years after the time, accepted by ordinary people. The Institution of the festivity of the nativity of Jesus, the Christ is ascribed to Tellesphorus, who lived in the reign of Antonius Pious between 138 and 161 A. D., but more certain traces we do not find, until in the reign of the emperor Commouds, who lived between the years 180 and 192 A. D. At that time, there was a great discussion, regarding the exact time, when Jesus, the Christ was born, and various attempts were made to fix the exact date of his birth, and those attempts resulted in the acceptance by some of the 20th of May, and by others of the 19th of April and the 5th of January, until afterwards it was decided by the community of Rome that the 25th of December was the date of birth of Christ. Even this date was not accepted in general, until the 5th century A. D., and this is the historical record. It is for this reason that the Latin churches observe the birthday of Jesus on the 25th of December, the Greek churches twelve days later, and the Armenian churches still twelve days later. If we go to Bethlehem, the home of Christmas, we shall find that this festival is continued for

the whole month, and different sects of Christians celebrate it at different times. So there is a whole month of Christmas, and it will be interesting to you to know that the Mohammedan soldiers, who are devoted followers of Mohammed, keep peace amongst the different sects of Christians, while they are celebrating this holy festival in Bethlehem.

Whether we know the exact date of the birth of Jesus, matters very little. Although there is no historical record of the precise time, year, month, and day, and the place, where Jesus, the Christ was born. Although there is no historical record, regarding the early miraculous events of the life of the Jesus, the Christ, still we can not help believing in the ideal life and exemplary character, as depicted in the Synoptic Gospels as of one, who was not only the Son of God, but also the divine incarnation and manifestation of that supreme Deity, who is the Lord of the universe and God of all nations. We can not deny this fact. If we read in the Bible the life and teachings of Jesus, the Christ, we believe that he was the incarnation of Divinity. When and where he was born, we do not know ; but still we believe in him through the writings of these great Gospel-makers. The students of Vedânta do not care whether the personality of Jesus was historical or not, whether he was born of the Virgin Mary or of another virgin or not, and whether he was the fulfilment of the prophecies of the old Jewish prophets or of the promise of Yahveh, the

tribal God of the house of Israel or of the Messianic object of the Jewish people, but the students of Vedânta regard him, with his sublime character and wonderful powers, as an incarnation of the Logos, the eternal Word of God, as in the case of all other saviours of the world. The eternal Word, which dwelt in Heaven with the Lord, is the Logos, and that Logos appeared in the form of Jesus, the Christ as well as in the form of Krishna, of Zoroaster, Buddha and all other saviours of the world. The students of Vedânta regard him as the incarnation of Divinity, as the Son of God, and as the Saviour of the world.

Jesus, the Christ lived the same simple life, always trusting the Lord, and without thinking of the morrow, as was lived by Buddha, Krishna, and other Vedântic seers and sages of ancient times, and his wonderful career had shown to the world that he possessed divine powers, and he manifested those powers through his acts. From his childhood, he lived in Godconsciousness and he realized that intimate relation which exists between the individual soul and the Heavenly Father. He proved to the world by his glorious works that he was the embodiment of purity and righteousness, and that he was the personification of divine wisdom and powers. We cannot deny this. By his unique career, renunciation and self-denial and sacrifice, he has conquered the hearts of all the spiritually-minded people among all nations, and has taught

them how to live the life of Blessedness, how to work for others, and how to live and to die for the good of humanity. He has lived a life, which stands as an example before all the seekers after spirituality. The disinterested love for humanity which was shown by Jesus, the Christ was unique, and following his example, we must try to love all human beings ; nay, all living creatures, as Buddha said. We must show that in our lives, and must follow the path of Jesus, the Christ in that universal love. It is for this reason that Vendânta accepts the ideal of Christ, and presents it before the world and all the seekers after spirituality, and asks them to follow the path of Jesus, the Christ, to be like Christ, to live the life of Jesus, the Christ, and to obey his teachings, worshipping him as the saviour of mankind and the Redeemer of the world.

In whatsoever heart the Christ ideal is accepted, there is sown the seed of charity, self-denial, reunciation, control of passions, universal love, and faith in God. These are the cardinal virtues of the religion of Jesus, the Christ, and there in fullness of time the tree will surely grow, bearing the fruit of the realization of that oneness with the Heavenly Father which was expressed by Jesus, the Christ, in his famous saying : "I and my Father are one". What he said, we must realize each one of us. By following the example of Jesus, the Christ, each one of us will be able to say in the same way, "I and my Father are one". If we cannot do this, we are not

followers of Jesus, the Christ. The moment we shall be able to realize that truth which was explained by Jesus, the Christ, we shall be able to call ourselves the true disciples of our master, and not until then. When the cave of the human soul will be illuminated by the divine light and glory of the newly-born spiritual Christ, and when our hearts will be filled with that light, the spiritual self of the true devotee will enjoy the blessings of spiritual Christmas, and will understand the true meaning of trinity by realizing the oneness of his individual soul with the Heavenly Father, through the state of superconsciousness. Jesus, the Christ, used to commune with the Lord, by entering into the state of superconsciousness, by rising above this material plane, and by forgetting the earthly existence ; and when we shall be able to do the same, the birth of spiritual Christ has taken place in our souls, and then the spiritual Christmas will spread its glory within us and all around us. That is the time for rejoicing.

The external Christmas is only a form, but let us understand the spirit of Christmas and let us understand the meaning, and that spirit and meaning we can only grasp through the sublime teachings of Vedânta which harmonize with the teachings of Jesus, the Christ, and through Vedânta we shall be able to realize the spiritual ideal Christ within ourselves, and become one with the Heavenly Father.

CHRIST AND CHRISTMAS

Jesus the Christ has been worshipped in Christendom as the incarnation of the Father in Heaven as well as the greatest saviour of mankind. It is believed that twenty centuries ago, on the twenty-fifth of December, this wonderful Redeemer was born of a virgin at Bethlehem as the fulfilment of the prophecies of the old Jewish prophets as well as of the promise of Yahveh, the Lord of the house of Israel.

It is said that after man's first disobedience and fall from Paradise, the wrath of the Lord fell upon Satan in the form of a curse that the woman's seed would bruise the serpent's head and crush the devil's power.¹ That curse which contained the indirect promise of the Lord, became in the end a great blessing to the world, and was fulfilled at the advent of the glorious Son of Man. When Abraham went forth from Ur of the Chaldees, obeying the command of God, he received the promise from the Lord that in his seed all nations would be blessed.² The same pledge was renewed to Isaac,³ and to Jacob⁴ who prophesied at the time

1. Gen. III. 14, 15.

2. Gen. XII. 2, 3, 7 ; XVII. 4, 6 ; XXII. 18.

3. Gen. XXVI. 3.

4. Gen. XXVIII. 14.

of his death that the Messiah should come.⁵ Moses, after delivering the Law to his people, declared that a prophet like unto himself would arise from among his brethren.⁶

Balaam came to curse Israel, but he changed his curse into a blessing when he saw the vision⁷ of the Almighty, the bright morning star,⁸ i. e., the Christ rising out of Jacob. It is said that King David foretold the miraculous advent, humiliation, cruel death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ (Psalms of David). Again, in the *Song of Songs*, Solomon is supposed to have spoken of the intimate union between the Christ and his church. Hosea is said to have predicted the return of the Son of God from Egypt and his resurrection on the third day. Amos foretold the raising of the fallen tabernacle of David,⁹ and the prophet Obadiah predicted : And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau ; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.¹⁰ The unnatural experience of Jonah has been interpreted to symbolize the resurrection of the Son of Man. It is said that Micah prophesied

5. Gen. XLIX 25.

6. The Lord thy God will rise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me ; unto him ye shall hearken ;—Deut. XVIII. 15.

7. Num. XXIII. 20.

8. Num. XXIV. 17.

9. In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen.—Amos IX. 11.

10. Obad. 21.

the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem,¹¹ and so did Isaiah.¹² We are told that Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven. Jeremiah predicted in the words of the Lord saying : "I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth... he shall be called "The Lord our Righteousness."¹³ Ezekiel spoke of Christ as the one shepherd.¹⁴ It is also said that Zechariah foretold the coronation of the Branch, the Son of David.¹⁵ Malachi also predicted : Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord : And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers....."¹⁶

According to the orthodox Christian belief, the Divine manifestation in the form of Jesus, the Christ came as a perfect fulfilment of all these promises, prophecies, and predictions. In the fullness of time, the miraculous conception of the Virgin Mary took place, and early on the twenty-fifth of December in the city of Bethlehem was born the only begotten son of the Heavenly Father to deliver the world from sin and to establish the

11. Mic. V. 2.

12. Js. IX. 6, 7.

13. Jer. XXIII. 5, 6 ; also XXXIII. 15.

14. Ezek. XXXVII. 24.

15. Zech. VI, 12, 13.

16. Mal. IV. 5, 6.

Kingdom of Heaven. A special star heralding the advent of the lord appeared above the horizon in the East, seeing which wise men came to adore the newborn babe, addressed as King of the Jews, worshipped and offered him gifts like gold, frankincense, etc.

King Herod, hearing these things, was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. When he discovered that he was mocked by the wise men, whom he had ordered to bring the news of the divine babe, he was extremely angry, and he sent forth wicked men to destroy all the children in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under. But, in the meantime, Joseph, the husband of Mary, was aroused one night from his sleep by an angel, through whose advice he took the young child and its mother, and departed to Egypt, thus saving the life of the future Redeemer of the world.

Then after the death of the wicked King Herod, they returned from Egypt to Galilee, and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. Such is the version according to Matthew. But Luke mentions the decree of taxation from Caesar Augustus, the swaddling clothes, manger, the announcement of the birth of the Saviour by the angel to the shepherds in the field, the blessings from Simeon and the prophetess Anna, and so on.

The *Apocryphal Gospels* describe many miracles, performed in Egypt by the young child Jesus. When he was twelve years old, Jesus displayed his wisdom, by asking and answering questions of the

learned doctors in Jerusalem. Then Jesus was baptized by one who was the incarnation of Elijah. It is said that at that time the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven saying : "Thou art my beloved Son ; in thee I am well pleased". Jesus was about thirty years old at that time. Returning from Jordan, he went into wilderness, fasted for forty days, and was tempted by the Devil. Having conquered the Devil, Jesus returned into Galilee, where he proclaimed his message in synagogues. From there he came to Nazareth, where he preached the gospel among the poor, healed the sick, cast out devils, restored the sight, and hearing of the blind and the deaf, resuscitated the dead and performed many miraculous deeds among his followers and disciples. Thus Jesus proved himself to be the Son of the living God. He entered Jerusalem, seated on an ass's colt, and was betrayed by one of his disciples, instituted and the memorial supper, and was afterwards crucified, having made a good confession of his Messiahship before Pontius Pilate. On the third day he resurrected, and appeared himself alive to his disciples. Jesus promised to return upon the clouds of heaven, to raise the dead, to establish his Kingdom, and to give to his devoted followers the crown of everlasting life.

Such was the life of the most wonderful Saviour, who is worshiped today by millions and millions of

sincere and earnest souls all over the world. The superhuman character of the sin-atonning Son of Man has not only been the object of veneration, reverence, love, and devotion among the vast majority of mankind for the last two thousand years, but has also become the source of comfort, consolation, and happiness at the time of their distress and sorrow, misery and unhappiness. In the name of the Saviour Christ, princes have renounced their treasures, husbands have forsaken their wives, wives their beloved husbands, parents have deserted their dutiful children, and children their loving parents. For the sake of that glorious, divine and self-abnegating Son of Man, thousands of martyrs have gladly given up their lives. The fire of inquisition was kindled by zealous priests to protect his religious banner. Thoughtful people who held their opinions against the popular beliefs of the churches, or dared to criticize the veracity of the scriptures, have been most brutally persecuted by the followers of this great Saviour. For many centuries the scientific researches and investigations were suppressed by the power of sword and fire, in order to preserve the superstition and ignorance of the faithful believers and devout worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But notwithstanding all these good and evil deeds that have been perpetrated in the name of Christ and his religion, the light of scientific investigation has dispelled the darkness of ignorance,

and has helped the intellectual sight of many to examine the truths, concerning the prophecies and predictions of the Jewish prophets of the pre-Christian era, and to question whether Jesus the Christ was truly the fulfilment of those prophecies, and whether the statements of the writers of the *Synoptic Gospels* were historical or merely based upon the local traditions believed, accepted and handed down by the credulous people of that age.

We all know that the geological researches of the century have shown that the first appearance of man on earth was not six thousand years ago, but in the Tertiary period which goes back beyond fifty thousand or one million years according to geological calculation. So the story of Adam and his temptation and fall is nothing but a myth. Similarly the Biblical story of the Deluge and of Noah's ark has been proved to be absurd and meaningless by Huxley and other scientists of the present age. A parallel for the story of Noah is to be found in the mythological story of Deucalion among the ancient Greeks, and the same mythical story of the deluge existed among the Zoroastrians, Hindus and Chinese of prehistoric times. Professor Bacon of Yale University says: "The earliest narratives of Genesis are already prophetic in character because they turn to the mass of folktale and legend current in the eighth or ninth century B. C". Regarding Abraham, for instance, the learned Professor says: "The figure of Abraham appears

purely and simply as the type of prehistoric Israel brought from the far-off East by Yahveh to inhabit the land of Canaan". He also says : The "Abraham of the New Testament would not be the historic figure if there were one. It would be but the ideal heir of Yahveh. The true Abraham is the ideal and this Abraham lived only in the mind of prophet and seer".

The higher critics of the Bible have shown that Moses did not give the Law, nor did he write any of the books of the Pentateuch, ascribed to him ; and that the prophecies of Balaam concerned the Judæan kingdom in the Assyrian period. It is proved now that David did not write the Psalter and that there is no reference in any Psalm to the expected Messiah. The *Song of Songs* has been proved not to be an allegory concerning the love of Christ for the Church, but it is an erotic poem describing the love of man and woman.

In fact, none of the Jewish prophets, who lived before the Babylonian Exile, ever referred to the Messiah. Hosea did not speak of the resurrection of Christ, but rebuked some of his contemporaries who thought that the evils of the nation could be cured in two or three days.

Jonah probably never had such an unnatural experience. Nor did Isaiah speak of a virgin bearing a child. It can be shown that the conception of a Messiah as a spiritual Saviour of the world owes its origin to the Persian conception of Saoshyant who,

according to the promise of Ahura Mazda, would appear on the Day of Judgement, destroy the evil influences of Ahriman, the same as the Satan of Christianity, and renovate the world. This idea was accepted by the Pharisees, while the orthodox Jews repudiated it.

As regards the time and place of the birth of the Saviour Christ, the accepted belief of the churches is that he was born on the twentyfifth of December at Bethlehem, during the reign of King Herod, when Cyrenius was the governor of Syria and when (according to Luke) Caesar Augustus decreed that all the world should be taxed. But history tells us that Cyrenius was not appointed to this office, until long after the death of Herod, during whose reign Matthew the narrator informs us that Jesus was born. The taxing spoken of by Luke did not take place until ten years after the time mentioned.

Eusebius, the first ecclesiastical historian (264-340 A. D.), therefore, places his birth in the year 10 A. D. Among early Christian churches there was no uniformity in the period of observing Christ's nativity. Some Christian writers fix 4 B. C. as the year when Jesus was born ; some 5 B. C. ; some again about 15 B. C., while, according to Basnage, the Jews placed his birth near a century sooner than the generally assumed epoch.

According to Irenaeus (A. D. 190), Christ lived for nearly fifty years. Rev. Dr. Giles says : "Concerning the time of Christ's birth there are even

greater doubts than about the place". Rev. Dr. Geikie also says : "Ewald appears to fix the date of the birth as five years earlier than our era. Petavius and Usher fix it as on the 25th of December, five years before our era ; Bengel, on the 25th of December, four years before our era ; Auger and Winer four years before our era, in the spring ; Scaliger, three years before our era, in October ; St. Jerome, three years before our era, on December 25 ; Eusebius, two years before our era, on January 6 ; and Ideler, seven years before our era, in December".¹⁷

According to Canon Farrar, although the date of Christ's birth cannot be fixed with absolute certainty, there is at least a large amount of evidence to render it probable that he was born four years before our era. But all attempts to discover the month and the day are useless.

Bunsen shows on the authority of Irenaeus that Jesus was born fifteen years before the time assigned. Others have placed it even in the third century B. C. As the year of the birth of Jesus is unknown, so is the month or the day.

The institution of the festival of the nativity of Jesus, as being held on the 25th of December, is attributed to Telesphorus, who lived during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161 A. D.), but the

17. Cf. Cunningham Geikie : *The Life and Words of Christ*, Vol. I, p. 559.

first certain traces of it are found during the time of the Emperor Commodus (180-192 A. D.).

For a long time various attempts had been made to discover the exact time, but they resulted for some in the 20th of May, with some in the 19th or 20th of April, and with others in the 5th of January. At last the opinion of the Community of Rome decided for the 25th of December, and it was not until the fifth century A. D. that this day was generally accepted.

For this reason the Latin Churches celebrate the Christmas festival on the 25th of December, the Greek Churches twelve days after that, and the Armenian Churches twelve days later still. If we go to Bethlehem, the home of Christmas, we shall see that this festival practically lasts for one month, being celebrated by the different Christian sects at different times. It would be very interesting to know that Turkish soldiers, who are devoted followers of Mohammed, should keep peace and prevent riots among the sectarian Christians, while they are engaged in the celebration of their holy festival.

It would also be interesting for many to know how Christmas is celebrated at Bethlehem. It has been said: "At two o'clock on the 24th of December a cavalcade passes out of Jerusalem through the Jaffa gate headed by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, royal representative of Rome. With him ride the French Consul to Jerusalem and

a throng of bishops and priests. A smaller cavalcade comes out of Bethlehem to meet the former on the hill-tops and at 4 o'clock the then combined cavalcades enter through the narrow streets of Bethlehem to the open Market Square in front of the church. The Turkish soldiers clear the space into which the Patriarch and his attendants are received by the priests. There on a rich carpet the Patriarch stands, changes his travelling garments, puts on rich ceremonial robes and purple and ermine vestments, a purple cap. The bishops likewise put on rich garments and coloured robes. Fifty boys begin the Christmas chant, the cross of the Patriarch is lifted and the procession enters the church under the protection of the Turkish soldiers. The priests celebrate the high mass in the afternoon and also in the evening. At midnight the Patriarch approaches the altar, and Partaking of the communion wine begins the chant of the nativity. The Patriarch draws aside the little curtain over the high altar, and reveals the image of the child Christ, and the grand anthem of the glory to God is sung in a chorus by all. Then a third high mass follows which lasts until three o'clock in the morning. The second image of a child in the rough manger is produced by the richly robed priests who place it before the altar. The throng prostrates and another chorus of praise breaks forth. The procession led by the Patriarch goes to the grotto of the nativity, where a short service is held by the priests and the

bells announce that the child is found." In the same manner the Greek and the Armenian churches celebrate the Christmas festival at Bethlehem.

In spite of all these are we sure that Jesus was born at Bethlehem? The Bible says so; but the first three Gospels were written nearly a century after the birth of Jesus, and the higher critics of the Bible, scholars and historians like Ernest Renan and others maintain that Jesus was born at Nazareth, and not at Bethlehem. Thus it can be shown that the birth-place of Jesus is unknown. It is still undecided whether he was born in a house in Bethlehem, as Matthew describes, or in a stable, as Luke says, or in a cave within three miles from Bethlehem, as the Apocryphal Gospel Protevangelium, describes, or at Nazareth, as Ernest Renan narrates.

Now let us see why the 25th of December was finally fixed as the birthday of Jesus. It has been described: "At the first moment after midnight of the 24th of December, the ancient nations celebrated the accouchement of the queen of heaven and celestial virgin, and the birth of the God Sol, the infant Saviour, and the God of Day" (Higgins). It was a time of great rejoicing in Persia, Egypt, Greece, India, China and other countries. In India, it is a time of merry-making everywhere, due to a great religious festival. The people decorate their houses with garlands, and make presents to friends and relatives. In China, at the time of the winter

solstice all shops are shut and the courts are closed. Among the ancient Persians this day was kept as the birthday of their Lord and Saviour Mithra. It was a time for great rejoicings.

The ancient Egyptians fixed 25th of March as the date, when the Saviour Horus descended from the womb of Isis, the Virgin Queen of Heaven, and towards the end of December the birth of the Saviour was commemorated for centuries before the birth of Christ. The Egyptians not only worshipped a Virgin mother before Christ was born, but also exhibited the effigy of her son in the manger.

The statues of the Egyptian Madonna, Isis, holding the Sun God Horus, is to be found in ancient temples just, as the Hindu Madonna Devaki held Krishna, the Hindu Christ in her arms centuries before the time of Jesus.

Osiris, the son of the holy Virgin, was born on the 25th of December. The Greeks celebrated this day as the birthday of Hercules. Bacchus was born on the 25th and so Adonis. Thus Hercules, Osiris, Bacchus, Adonis, Horus, Mithra, every one of them was born of a virgin mother on the 25th of December, the day after the winter solstice.

The 25th of December was a great holiday in ancient Rome. Rev. Mr. Gross says: "In Rome before the time of Christ a festival was observed on the 25th of December under the name of *Natalis Solis Invicti* (Birthday of Sol the Invincible). It

was a day of universal rejoicings, illustrated by illuminations and public games. All public business was suspended, declarations of war and criminal executions were postponed, friends made presents to one another and the slaves were indulged with great liberties." A few weeks before the winter solstice the Calabrain shepherds used to come to Rome to play pipes.

In the third century, Herodian writing tells us that the Latins kept the festival of the Saturnalia in December, to commemorate the hidden God, just before the feast of the New Year, in honour of Janus, whose image had two faces, because in him was the end of the old and the beginning of the new year, * * the festival lasting for seven days beginning from the 17th of December. The time was one of universal goodwill calling up thoughts of the golden age past and to come. * * little images * * were made and distributed as presents among the children.

Well has it been said by Saint Chrysostom, who flourished about 390 A. D., that the "birthday of Christ was lately fixed at Rome on the 25th of December in order that whilst the heathen were busy with their pofane ceremonies, the Christians might perform their holy rites undisturbed." Dr. Hooykaus remarks that the church was always anxious to meet the heathen half-way, by allowing them to retain the feasts they were accustomed to, only giving them a Christian dress

or attaching a new Christian signification to them,

In the same manner, the ancient German Yule feast, which was annually celebrated for centuries before Jesus at the time of the winter solstice in honour of the Sun-God, was afterwards connected with the Christmas festival. At this feast, agreements were renewed, the gods were consulted as to the future, sacrifices were made to them, and the time was spent in Jovial hospitality. Many features of this festival, such as burning the Yule-log on Christmas Eve, still survive. At first they used to burn a log, but now they burn candles. Christmas-tree was the German Yule tree. Another name for Christmastide is Yule-tide. In French, it is called Noel which is the Hebrew or Chaldee word Nule.

Among the ancient Scandinavians the greatest festival was at the winter solstice. They called the night upon which it was observed *Mother Night* and the feast was named *Jul*—the origin of the word *Yule*. It was celebrated in honour of Freyr (the son of Odin and the goddess Frigga), who was born on that day. Feasting, night carouses, and demonstrations of a most disolate joy were permitted on this occasion. And the principal guests received valuable presents, such as horses, swords, battle axes, gold rings, etc., at their departure at the end of this festival.

The ancient Druids celebrated this festival in

Great Britain and Ireland with great fires, lighted on the top of hills. They called it Nolahg or Noel or the day of regeneration. All these ancient customs are being observed in some form or other today among the civilized nations.

The evergreens and particularly the mistletoe which are used all over the Christian world at Christmas time, betray the heathen origin of the Christmas. Tertullian, the Church Father (200 A. D.) wrote to his brethren affirming it to be 'rank idolatry', to deck their doors with garlands and flowers, according to the heathen custom. What have evergreens and garlands and Christmas-trees to do with Christ's birth? These are the relics of the old Yule feast. The tree symbolizes the ideas of the pagan forefathers, and their faith that the powers of the returning sun will reclothe the earth with green and hang new fruits on trees. Foliage, such as laurel myrtle, ivy and all evergreens were Dionysiac plants, symbols of regenerative power, signifying perpetuity of youth and vigour.

Gibbon says in his history: "The Roman Christians ignorant of the real date of Christ's birth fixed the solemn festival to the 25th of December the *Brumalia* or Winter Solstice, when the pagans annually celebrated the birth of Sol."

Although there is no historical record of the exact time, year, month, day and place regarding the birth of the Saviour Christ, although the events connected with the early life of Jesus are

not based upon historical facts, still the ideal life and the exemplary character as depicted by the writers of the four Gospels show that the Son of Man was no other than the Son of God, nay, the incarnation of the supreme Deity who is the God of the universe and the Lord of all nations.

That meek and gentle and self-sacrificing Son of Man, who preached in Galilee nearly two thousand years ago and led his disciples along the path of righteousness toward the abode of infinite goodness and perfection, was the incarnation of the same almighty Divinity who manifested Himself in Persia, as Zoroaster, in India, as Krishna, Buddha, Râmakrishna and other Divine incarnations, who flourished both before and after the Christian era. From his childhood Jesus, the Christ lived in Godconsciousness, and realized the most intimate relation which the individual soul bears to the Father of the universe. Through every action of his earthly career the Saviour Christ manifested Divine powers and exemplified the Truth that he was the embodiment of purity, unselfishness and righteousness, and the personification of Divinity on earth.

The students of Vedânta do not care whether the personality of Jesus was historical or not, whether he was born of a virgin at Bethlehem or not, whether he was the fulfilment of the old prophecy, or of the promise of Yahveh, the tribal God of the house of Israel, or of the Messianic

hope of the Jewish people, but the students of Vedânta recognize in the sublime character of the Saviour Christ the manifestation of the universal Logos, or the Word of God, as they do in other incarnations of the same almighty Being.

Jesus lived the same simple life, always trusting in the Divine will, without thinking of the morrow, as was done by Buddha and the other Vedântic Seers of Truth of ancient India. That wonderful Redeemer whose life and teachings have transformed the character of thousands, and have brought spiritual light to millions and millions of people, preached the same law of righteousness and Divine love as were inculcated in India by Buddha and other Avatâras.

By his unique self-renunciation, self-sacrifice and disinterested love for humanity, Jesus, the Christ has conquered the hearts of the spiritually minded people among all nations, and has taught them how to live the life of blessedness, how to reach perfection and God-consciousness, how to work for others, and how to live and die for the good of humanity, and for that reason Vedânta accepts the spiritual Christ ideal, presents him before the seekers of spirituality, and tells them to follow his path and to worship him as the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind and the Redeemer of the world.

In whichever heart the Christ ideal is accepted, there is sown the seed of charity, self-denial,

control of passions, renunciation, universal love, and faith in God, which were the cardinal virtues of the religion of Christ, and there in the fulness of time will surely grow the tree of spirituality, bearing the fruit of the realization of the true meaning of '*I and my Father are one*', the oneness of the individual soul with the universal Spirit. It is in that temple of the human soul that the birth of the spiritual Christ should be celebrated in peace and silence. When the cave of the human heart will be illumined with the Divine light and the glory of the newborn spiritual Christ, then will the spiritual self of the devotee enjoy the blessings of the spiritual Christmas, and commune with the Son of God, and realize the Essence of the Trinity, by entering into the state of super-consciousness.

CHAPTER VIII

VEDANTA AND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Wherever there is a decline of religion, or a rise of irreligion, the Lord manifests Himself in a human form. The divine Being thus incarnates in flesh from age to age, wherever such incarnations are needed. These manifestations of Divinity on earth are called in Sanskrit *Avatara*, which means incarnations of God, or 'descendants of God in a human form'. Such descendants of God have appeared among many nations in the past, and will appear among the nations of the future, for God loves all nations, every individual, whether man, woman or child, equally, irrespective of his or her caste, creed or nationality. His light, like the light of the sun, shines equally on the head of the every living creature on this earth, and no particular tribe or nation can claim any special favour from God, who is infinite in love, infinite in wisdom, and omnipresent. His unbounded love and unlimited justice can never be restrained by anything in the universe. He manifests wherever and whenever such manifestations are needed, sometimes, in India, sometimes in Persia, in Arabia, or in Palestine, or in some other part of the world.

And no one can tell where such manifestations again may appear.

But the object of these incarnations of God is the same everywhere. They come to help mankind, to show to him the path of righteousness, and to show how to live the God-like life, and how to realize that Divinity, which dwells in each individual soul, and that to follow that divine will in every action should be the aim of human life.

These Divine incarnations teach us how to conquer selfishness and the evils that proceed from living a life of selfishness, and how to be free from that attachment to the lower self, and to the things that are transient, and above all, how to enter into the domain of blessedness, purity and love, which is everlasting and eternal.

Such incarnations of God are born with a knowledge of higher spiritual laws and truths. From childhood their eyes are open to the real nature of things. From the very first they recognize this oneness of the individual soul with the universal Spirit. Before they receive instruction from outside, they realize that their real nature is truth—is one with the universal spirit of the Father in Heaven. They know that the eternal current of Divine will is incessantly flowing through the river of their lives, and that their physical forms are merely instruments, guided, directed and moved by the all-knowing power of

that Divine will. They know that the utterances of their own mouths are expressions of that Divine will. In short, they are the embodiments of purity and righteousness ; they are personifications of Divinity on earth, and they are those sons of God who have realized and cannot forget their Divine nature.

Such incarnations become the Saviour of the world, by showing the path to perfection. The exemplary lives of such incarnations are inspirations to the masses. Such is the nature of the incarnations which have appeared in India and other places. They are worshipped in the East, as Râma, or Buddha, or Krishna, and in the West as Christ. For we find the same incarnation of Divinity in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the meek, gentle and self-sacrificing Son of Man who preached in Galilee the same truth, and same spirituality that was taught and shown in India and in other places, long before his birth. He lived the simple saintly life of the Vedântic sage, trusting always in Divine will, without thinking of the morrow. This wonderful redeemer, Jesus, the Christ, whose life and teachings have transformed the character and brought spiritual light to millions and millions of human beings, was at first surrounded by a handful of disciples, whom he taught how to live the life of blessedness, how to live and work for others, and how to die for others, and, above all, how to be conscious of that spiritual oneness, which is

the aim and end of all religions. In and through his life, he taught charity, self-denial, control of passions, renunciation, universal love, faith in God and the realization that the individual soul is one with the universal spirit. These are the principal points of his teachings.

About charity, he said to his disciples, be kind to all, be kind to the poor especially, give freely, and give to the poor whatever they need. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." "With what measure ye mete, it shall be meted to you again." About self-denial, he said: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself", "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it". "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" He showed in his life how to control passions by practising austerities, by fasting for forty days, and by other ascetic methods. He said to his disciples: "Love thy neighbour as thyself". "Love thine enemies and do good to them that hate thee". He said "Have intense faith in God". About unity, he said: "I and my father are one". "I am in the Father and the Father in me". "I am in you and you are in me". "The God of heaven is within you".

If, on the other hand, we read the sayings of other incarnations of God, such as Rama or Krishna, who flourished in India long before the birth of Jesus, we find the same teachings. In the life of Buddha, who lived about 500 years before the time

of Jesus, we find the same practices of charity, self-denial, control of the passions, and universal love for all, etc. In India, as it has been said, it is commonly believed that all these great incarnations of God have come and do come to re-establish forgotten truths, to point out the same truths that were discovered ages before their birth. They bring new life to the old truths ; they show how we can live up to those ideals.

If we read the teachings of the Vedântic sages who existed in prehistoric times, we find these spiritual and ethical laws summed up in three simple words : "Once upon a time a disciple went up to a great Rishi, or seer of Truth, and asked him what he should do to become righteous. The Rishi answered in three words: *damayata*, *datta*, *dayâddham*. The first word, *damayata*, means 'subdue thyself, control thy passions, conquer the senses, pride, egotism and selfishness'. The second word, *datta*, signifies 'give freely' and be liberal to the poor and the needy, and be charitable to your neighbour and to all'. The third word is *dayâddham*, and means 'be kind to all Have pity and compassion for all. Love all as you love yourself'.

Thus we find, in the oldest teachings, expressions of the highest ethical laws, charity, self-control, and universal love. We know that these spiritual and ethical laws repeatedly have been taught and popularized by the great sages, holy men, prophets

and the incarnations of God, who do not come to teach anything new, but to give new life to the old sayings or old laws that already existed, and which are eternal. Truth is always truth, whether it is discovered today or was known thousands of years ago. We should understand that these incarnations did not learn these laws by reading books. They learned from the Divinity within themselves; they went to the fountainhead of wisdom. If an incarnation of God were to come here today, he would teach the same truths which were taught by Jesus, by Buddha, or by any other incarnation of the past.

A disciple went to his master, a great sage who lived in India not very long ago, and asked him this question: "When Jesus was on the cross, how could he pray for his enemies in spite of all his sufferings and agony of death? How could he do that?" The master replied: "If you drive a nail through a green cocoanut, I mean through the shell of a green :cocoanut, you will touch the kernel too, and will make a hole in the kernel. In a green cocoanut, the kernel is attached to the shell, and by driving a nail through the shell, you drive it through the kernel too. But, in a dry cocoanut, the kernel becomes separated from the shell, and if you drive a nail through the shell, the kernel is not pierced. "So", he said, "the ordinary men of the world are like green cocoanuts, but Jesus was like a dry cocoanut. When they

pierced his body, which was the mere shell, he was not disturbed. That did not affect his soul. His inner soul was separate from his body, although living within the body ; and that is the reason why he could pray for his enemies”.

Whosoever is able to free himself from the attachment of the shell or body can do the same. Vedânta points out the universal law which underlies all the actions of incarnate God.

If an incarnation of God does this thing, others will have the same power when they have attained to the same state. If Jesus cured diseases and transformed the character by a single touch, every one will do the same when he shall have attained to the same spiritual realization. Otherwise how can we account for the miracles which have been accomplished in those countries where Jesus is not accepted as the Saviour ?

Another teaching of Jesus recently have been discovered by some Oriental scholars : “Raise the stone : there thou shalt find me. Cleave the wood : there am I”. Many have tried to explain it, in different ways. It has produced a great discussion among scholars. But Vedânta says the same thing. When a great sage, or a prophet, or an incarnation of God, uses the words ‘I’ and ‘my’ he does not use it in the same sense that we do. ‘I’ and ‘my’, with him, do not signify physical form : the terms mean spirit : real nature. Vedânta says : “I am in the sun : I am in the

moon : I am in the stars : I am everywhere". He cannot mean his physical form, he means omnipresent spirit. Krishna says : I am the original : from me proceeds everything : all the universe". And knowing this, wise men worship him with love. He also says : "Give up all the formalities of religion. Come unto me. Take thy refuge in me. and I shall make you free from the senses, the coarse nature".

How can he mean the physical form ? How could he refer to the lower self which commonly is understood by 'I' or 'my' or 'mine' ? He indicates the divine self, that higher spirit which dwells in the human soul, and which is immortal ; which is perfect, sinless, which is one with God. If we remember this, we cannot mistake the teachings of the masters ; we can understand easily and clearly.

You will notice in the philosophy of Vedânta that it does not say that we are born sinners ; that we are sinful. On the contrary, it teaches that each individual is a child of Divinity. We are children of immortal bliss. We cannot be sinners. By 'sin', Vedânta means selfishness which proceeds from ignorance of our real nature. When we forget that we are divine we become selfish. When we think that we are separate from universal spirit, from the universe, from you and from everybody, then we become self-centred. All the teachings and commandments of God which we find in

different scriptures, 'Do not do this', or 'Do this or that', are summed up in two simple sentences : Do not be selfish. Be unselfish. That selfishness vanishes when the divine wisdom comes. Divine wisdom is like a fire which burns everything into ashes "As birds and deer do not approach a burning mountain, so sin cannot come near to the soul which has realized its true nature ; which comprehends that it is one with the universal spirit". Consequently, there is escape from sin.

Jesus said : "Ask, and it shall be given unto you". But he did not say, "I shall ask for you and you will get it". "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you". He did not say, "I shall knock for you and it shall be opened unto you". He said : "Seek, and ye shall find", So we shall have to ask, we shall have to knock, we shall have to seek. And how can we do that ? Vedânta teaches that we shall have to do it in this way : Follow the teachings of those persons who are spiritual, who are strictly moral, who live a righteous life. Follow their example in your everyday life, Try constantly to carry out your idea through your action. Control the passions, subjugate the senses, deny yourself. Endure pain and sorrow without dejection or lamentation and have faith in the teachings of the masters. Meditate on your higher nature, which is spiritual. which is divine, which is immortal. Do not pray for this thing or that thing: Some say : 'Give me this' or 'Give me

that'. They are like beggars, You should not think of your lower self when you pray. Send a current of good thought of love, towards all living creatures.

When the effect of these efforts is established, then comes renunciation through love, which Jesus taught: "Sell all thou hast, give to the poor, come and follow me", he said, and according to Vedânta, that kind of renunciation is a high form of love. When a person realizes that he is a spirit, that he is divine, that he is immortal, he can give up anything he possesses, because he finds that he does not individually possess anything. He says: "Whatever is mine is thine: Whatever is thine is mine". Such persons are ready to give up their bodies even, if by sacrificing their bodies they can do good to the world, because they are not attached so strongly to their bodies as we are. If we have a little headache, we become miserable; if a little disappointment, we weep and wail. But he who has realized his own real nature, which is divine, which is immortal, which is free from disease and sorrow, is never miserable. If this body is pierced through and through, he laughs, and blesses the evil doer. Such instances are to be found in every country where these incarnations are manifested,

Ethically and spiritually the teaching of Jesus are in complete harmony with those of Vedânta, and the steps towards the attainment of spirituality

are identical, but Jesus spoke in parables, while Vedânta affords a rational foundation for ethics and religion. Vedânta invites all those who want explanation, and who desire to understand why we should be moral, and why we should be virtuous and lead a spiritual life, Vedânta invites these and tries to help them.

DID CHRIST TEACH A NEW RELIGION

The religion of Jesus, the Christ was not like the orthodox Christianity of today ; neither did it resemble the faith of the Jewish nation. His religion was a great departure from Judaism in principles and ideals as well as in the means of attaining them. It was much simple in form and more sublime in nature. The religion that Christ taught had neither dogma, nor creed, nor system, and nor theology. It was a religion without priests, without ceremonials, without rituals, or even strict observances of the Jewish laws.

As in India Buddha rebelled against the ceremonials, rituals, and priestcraft of the Brâhmans, and introduced a simpler form of worship and a religion of the heart, so among the Jews, nearly five hundred years after Buddha, Jesus of Nazareth rebelled against the priestcraft of Judaism, Jesus saw the insufficiency of the Jewish ethics and ideals and the corruption and the hypocrisy of the priests. He wished to reform the religion of his country and to establish a simpler and purer form of worship of the supreme Being, which should rest entirely upon the feelings of the heart, not upon the letter of the law.

The God of Jesus was not the cruel and revengeful tribal deity of the house of Israel ; He was the universal Spirit, He was not like the tyrannical master of modern orthodoxy, who kills demons and saves mankind according to his whim, He was a loving Father. Jesus' worship consisted not in ceremonials, but in direct communion between his soul and the Father, without any priestly intermediary. The idea of God as the 'Father in Heaven' did not, however, originate with Jesus the Christ, as modern Christians generally' believe ; it existed in the religious atmosphere of northern Palestine as a result of the Hellenic influence of the worship of Jupiter—Greek, *Zeus-Pitar* ; Sanscrit, *Dayus-pitar*, which means Father in Heaven, and hence 'Father of the universe'. The worship of Jupiter was introduced into Babylon and Northern Palestine by Antiochus Epiphanes between 175 and 163 B. C. Although the orthodox Jews revolted against this innovation, yet there were many liberal-minded Jews among the Pharisees who liked the idea, accepted it, and preached it. One of the most prominent of the Jewish priests, who was considered by many as the true master and predecessor of Jesus and who was held in great esteem by the Pharisaic sect of the Jews, inculcated this belief in the merciful and fatherly character of God. His name was Rabbi Hillel, The Talmud speaks of this Babylonish teacher in glowing terms, declaring that he was next to the

prophet Ezra. It was Hillel who first preached this golden Rule among the Jews. He used to spend much time in meditation and study, and recommended such practices to his disciples. Hillel died when Jesus was about ten years old.

Thus we see the idea of the Fatherhood of God existed in northern Palestine at the time of Jesus, and was preached in public by Rabbi Hillel. Moreover, at the same time Philo and other Neo Platonist Jews in Alexandria were teaching the fatherly character of God and the only-begotten Sonship of the Logos, or World. Both the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of the Word were known to the Greeks and other Aryan nations, especially the Hindus of ancient India. Jesus of Nazareth took up this grand Aryan idea and emphasized it more strongly than any of his predecessors in Palestine.

At the time that Jesus appeared in Galilee, the religious atmosphere of the place was permeated with Persian doctrines, Hellenic ideas, Pythagorean thoughts, and the precepts of the Essenes, Therapeutæ, Gymonosophists, and the Buddhists of India. Galilee was then aglow with the fire of religious enthusiasm, and kindled by the ardour of social and political dissensions. The Jews were already divided into three principal sects, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes. Each of these was trying to gain supremacy and power over the others. The Sadducees were the conser-

vative and aristocratic class, while the Pharisees and the Essenees were essentially liberal. It was a time of great disturbance, intrigues, insurrections, rebellions, and wars. Such a period naturally kindles the fire of patriotism in the heart of a nation, and forces its members to become active in every possible way. The misfortunes and calamities that befell the descendants of Israel, made them remember the promises of Jahveh which were handed down to them through the writings of the prophets and forced them to seek supernatural aid in the fulfilment of those promises. The unconquerable pride of the sons of Israel that they were the 'chosen people' of Jahveh, the only true God, who was their governor and director, stimulated their minds with the hope that, through the supernatural power of Jahveh, the kingdom of their great ancestors would be restored : that a member of David's house would appear as the Messiah (the Anointed), sit on the throne, and unite the twelve tribes of Israel under his sceptre, and govern them in peace and prosperity. This was the first conception of a Messiah ever arose in the minds of the Jews. It was the principal theme of the poets and prophets who lived during the Babylonian Exile. The glory of the house of Israel and the earthly prosperity of the sons of Jahveh were the highest ideals of the Jews. They did not mean by Messiah a spiritual Saviour of the world. The Christian idea of this term owes its origin to the Zoroastrian

conception of the coming Messiah Soshiyanta, who according to the promise of Ahura Mazda, would appear on the day of judgment, destroy the evil influence of Ahriman, and renovate the world. This idea was accepted by the Pharisees, while the orthodox Jews repudiated it.

Although the mind of Jesus, according to the *Synoptic Gospels*, was not free from the superstitious beliefs of the Jews and the national traditions of his time, although he accepted the Zoroastrian conception of a 'coming Messiah' and that the end of the world was imminent as well as the Persian ideas (which did not exist in Judaism before the Babylonian Captivity) of the renovation of the world, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, the punishment of the wicked, and the salvation of the righteous ; although Jesus believed with the Pharisees in the Persian conception of heaven and hell and the devil, and saw many angels ascending and descending over his head, yet he realized that the Kingdom of God was a spiritual kingdom : that it was within himself ; he felt the presence of the Father within him, and asked his disciples to feel likewise. The Jews understood by the kingdom of Jahveh the kingdom of this world and the prosperity of the house of Israel. But Jesus spiritualized that ideal, and taught a reign of righteousness and justice ; not a reign of strife between nations, but a kingdom of peace and love. Jesus preached this

idea among his people in the same way which Buddha declared that he came to establish a kingdom of peace and love and righteousness upon earth. Buddha did not use the expression 'kingdom of God', but preferably 'kingdom of justice, peace, and love'. Jesus had to use the former expression because it was dominant in the minds of the people about him.

These ideas regarding a kingdom of peace and love were scattered in northern Palestine for at least two centuries before the Christian era by the Buddhist missionaries. It is indeed a well-known historical fact that the gospel of peace, good-will and love was preached in Syria and Palestine by Buddhist monks nearly two hundred years before Christ. Their influence was felt most deeply by the Jewish sect, called Essenes or the Therapeutæ, to which sect, as many scholars believe, Jesus himself belonged. It is interesting to note the similarities between the Esseness and the followers of Buddha. The Buddhists were also called *Theyaputta*, a Pâli form of the Sanskrit *Sthiraputta*, meaning 'the son of Sthira or Thera i. e. one who is serene, enlightened, and undisturbed by the world. There was one of Buddha's names. These people had the power to heal disease.

Readers of the history of India are aware that in 249 B. C., Asoka the Great, the Buddhist emperor made Buddhism the state religion of

India, and sent missionaries to all parts of the world then known to him, to preach the gospel of Buddha. He sent missionaries from Siberia to Ceylon, and from China to Egypt. These missionaries preached the doctrines of Buddhism, not by bloodshed and sword, but by scattering blessings, good-will and peace, where they went. The edicts or stone inscriptions of Asoka were written during his lifetime. One of these edicts mentions five Greek kings who were Asoka's contemporaries,—Antiochus of Syria, Ptolemaos of Egypt, Antigonus of Macedon, Magas of Cyrene, and Alexander of Epiros. The edict says that Asoka made treaties with these kings, and sent Buddhist missionaries to their kingdoms to preach the gospel of Buddha. "Both here and in foreign countries", says Asoka, "everywhere the people follow the doctrine of the Beloved of the gods, wheresoever it reacheth". Mahaffy, the Christian historian says: "The Buddhist missionaries preached in Syria two centuries before the teaching of Christ, (which has so much in common with the teaching of Buddha), and this was heard in northern Palestine".

The labours of these Buddhist monks were not fruitless in these places. They continued to preach through parables, the highest ideals of religion from generation to generation. Their communities, bound to a life of celibacy, which was not a Jewish custom, increased from age to age, as outsiders

joined their ranks. Even the Alexandrian Neo-Platonist Philo, who was a contemporary of Christ, mentions in his writings once or twice the 'Indian Gymnosophists', or Buddhists, and says that the Essenes numbered about fore thousand at the time. The doctrines of the Essenes, their manner of living, and the vows of their communities show the results of the Buddhists missionary work during the two centuries immediately preceding the birth of Christ. Pliny says : "The Essenes live on the western shore of the Dead Sea. They are a hermit clan, one marvellous be-young all others in the world, without any women, without the joys of domestic life, without money, and the associates of the palm-trees". If we read Josephus we find how highly the Essenes of those days were respected.

One of the peculiar practices of the Essenes a peculiarity of the Buddhist monks. The life led by John the Baptist was typical of that of a Buddhist monk. Exactly like a Buddhist, the Essene rose before sunrise, and said his morning prayers with his face turned towards the east. When the day broke, he went to work. Agriculture, cattle-breeding, bee-keeping, and other peaceful trades were among his ordinary occupations. He remained at work until eleven o'clock ; then he took a bath, put on white linen, and ate plain vegetable food. The Essenes abstained from meat and wine. They also wore leather aprons, as did some of the Buddhist monks. The Essene novice took solemn

oath to honour God, to be just toward his fellow-men, to injure no one either of his own accord or by order of others, not to associate with the unrighteous, to assist the righteous, to be ever faithful to all, always to love truth, and to keep his hands from theft and his soul from unholy gain. There were some who joined the order after having lived a married life.

Earnest Renan says : "The Essenes resembled the *Gurus* (spiritual masters) of Brâhmanism". "In fact", he asks "might there not in this be a remote influence of the Mounis (holy saints of India)" ? According to Renan, "Babylon had become for sometime a true focus of Buddhism. Boudasp (Bodhisattya, another name of Buddha) was reputed as a wise Chaldean and the founder of Sabaism, which means, as its etymology indicates, baptism". He also says : "We may believe, at all events that many of the eternal practices of John, of the Essenes, and of the Jewish spiritual teacher of the time were derived from influences then existing but recently received from the far East", which means India. Thus we can understand that there was an indirect influence of the Buddhist monks upon the mind of Jesus through the Essenes, and especially through John the Baptist.

Although Jesus neither pretended to have created the world, nor to govern it, yet his followers worshipped and loved him as the Messiah ; and later on the writer of the Fourth Gospel identified

him with the 'Word', or Logos of Philo, about the latter part of the third century of the Christian era. According to the *Synoptic Gospels*, the idea of the advent of the end of the world and of the reign of justice and the kingdom of God grew so strong in the mind of Jesus that apparently it forced him to think that he, the Son and the bosom friend of his Father, must be the executor of God's decrees and that through him such a kingdom of justice and goodness should be established. This thought gradually led him to believe that, as he was the Son of God, he should be the universal Reformer, and was born to establish the kingdom of God.

The fundamental principles of the religion of Jesus, however, were purity, charity, selfdenial, control of passions, renunciation, non-attachment to wealth, and to earthly things, intense faith, forgiveness and love for enemies, and the realization of the unity of the soul with the 'Father in Heaven'. During the one year of his public life as a spiritual teacher, Jesus taught his disciples these principles, and showed them the way to practise them by his living example. But all these grand ethical and spiritual doctrines, upon which the religion of Jesus was founded, were practised for nearly three centuries before Christ by the Buddhist preachers in Babylon and Syria, and they were taught in India for ages before that. The same ideas were inculcated by the

Vedic sages, by the Vedânta philosophers, and afterwards by the *Avatâras*, or Incarnations of God, like Râma, Krishna (who lived about 1400 B. C.), Buddha (547 B. C.), Sankara, Chaitanya, and Nânaka, and also by Râmkrishna of the nineteenth century. If we study the lives of these men, we find that, like Jesus, each one of them lived a pure, spotless and unselfish life of renunciation, always loving humanity and doing good to all.

Those who have read the doctrines of Buddha know that the ethical teachings of Jesus seem like repetitions of what Buddha taught. Those who have read the *Bhagavad Gitâ*, or '*the Song Celestial*', will remember that the fundamental principles of Krishna's teachings were purity of heart, self-denial, control of passions, renunciation, love towards enemies, forgiveness, and the realization of the unity of the soul with the Father. In short, the religion of Christ was taught before him by Buddha and Krishna in India. Like Jesus the Christ, Krishna said in the *Bhagavad Gitâ*: "I am the path. Follow me and worship one God. I existed before the world was created. I am the Lord of all". And again: "Giving up the formalities of religion, come unto me; follow me; take refuge in me. I shall free thee from sins and give eternal peace unto thee. Grieve not".⁷

7. *The Bhagavad Gitâ* says,

But although Jesus the Christ did not teach a new religion, still he came to fulfil and not to destroy. He gave a new life to the old truths, and by his wonderful personality impressed them upon the minds of his own people.

MOHAMMED AND HIS TEACHINGS

Nearly six hundred years after the advent of glorious Son of Man, the Divine powers of the Lord were again manifested in the world through the great prophet of Arabia, the founder of Islam.

He was born in Mecca, the capital of Arabia in the sixth century A. D. Arabia is a peninsula about 400 miles long, washed by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Suez on the west, the Indian Ocean on the south, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman on the east, and bounded on the north by a portion of Syria. It is a country, covered by a vast sandy desert excepting the sea coasts, where green valleys with high mountains and scanty vegetation were at first inhabited by nomadic Arab tribes. Very little of Arabia was known to the Civilized world before the time of Mohammed. The Arabs themselves knew of nothing beyond their own desert. These tribes claimed their descent from the family of Abraham, and lived in small villages along the coasts, roamed over the peninsula from place to place upon camels, carrying on a caravan trade among different tribes and speaking the same language ; but each tribe enjoyed independence under a crude patriarchal government

by its chief. The Arabs were impetuous, restless, lawless, and warlike in their nature.

Pliny says : "The Arabian tribes are equally addicted to theft and to merchandise ; the caravans that traverse the desert are ransomed or pillaged ; and their neighbours, since the remote time of job and Sesostries, have been the victims of their rapacious spirit. A single robber or a few associates are branded with their genuine name, but the exploits of a numerous hand assume the character of lawful and honourable war. The temper of a people, thus armed against mankind, was doubly inflamed by the domestic license of rapine, murder and revenge. Each Arab, with impurity and renown, might point his javelin against the life of his countryman. The Arabs were addicted to drinking, adultery and gambling. They had neither social nor religious restrictions to marriage or divorce".

A man used to marry an orphan for her money and leave or illtreat her as soon as he had secured it. A divorced woman was not allowed to remarry, as it was considered a slur upon her husband. Revengeful women would not remain satisfied until blood was shed. Slaves were treated as beasts of burden. Human sacrifices prevailed in the temples, parents dragged their own sons to the altar and buried the female children to propitiate their blood-thirsty idols.

Well has it been said by Gibbon, the historian :

"In this primitive and abject state, which ill deserves the name of society, the human brute, without arts or laws, almost without sense or language, is poorly distinguished from the rest of the animal creation". They had no religion higher than gross idolatry of which the chief seat was Kaabâ in Mecca or ancient Macoraba, the capital of Macoraba. The Greeks gave the name Macoraba. The ancient legend of the Arabs tells us that this Kaabâ was the most sacred temple in the country for it was originally built by Abraham. The story runs thus: Hager, Abraham's wife, wandering through the desert with her little boy in arms, reached at length the valley of Meccâ. She, being extremely thirsty left her son Ishmail crying on the ground and began to search to and fro for water. Ishmail kicked around him, in childish passion, and lo! beneath his feet the spot bubbled forth into a stream of clear sweet water. This was the famous well Zam-Zam. Amelkites and Arab tribes from Yemen attracted by this fountain settled by there Ishmail grew up among them and married the daughter of their chief. On a subsequent visit the patriarch Abraham, assisted by his son Ishmail, erected the temple where it now stands and established the ancient rites of pilgrimage.

The direct descendants of Ishmail were known as Korish and they were at first the gaurdians of this temple and of the well. Cossai, a Korish

chief, became the priest of Kaabâ in the fifth century A. D., held the key of the temple and gave food and drink from the sacred well to the pilgrims who gathered there every year. The pilgrims used to visit the Kaabâ to kiss the mysterious stone embedded in the eastern corner and to make seven circuits round the sacred temple. There were many idols in the Kaabâ, the chief of which was Hobal (Hebal). Each tribe had its own idol in the Kaabâ, numbering about 360, some were shaped like human beings, others like angels lion and so on. They were called by different names such as Rahel, Al-Lat, Al-Uzza.

Thus the religion of Mecca at the time of Mohammed's birth was a mixture of idol-worship, stone-worship, and Sabaism or the worship of heavenly bodies. The people were extremely superstitious. They recognized Abraham as the friend of God, whose name in Arabic was Āllâ-Tâlâ, the most high God, to whom gods and idols were subordinate.

The worship of Kaabâ satisfied the Arab minds, for it was founded upon the patriarchal traditions common at once to Christianity and Judaism. About this time both the Jews and the Arabs were expecting a great prophet among their people. Under such conditions the messenger of Lord Āllâ-Tâlâ appeared in Meccâ to establish true religion and destroy the gross idolatry and superstitions of the Arab tribes.

The prophet of Arabia, was descended from the family of Cossai, the priest of Kaabâ and the chief of the Korish tribe of Meccâ. His father's name was Ābdullâ or the servant of God and his mother's name Āminâ. At the age of 25 Ābdullâ married Āminâ, and after staying with her for three days left his wife and went on a mercantile expedition to Gâzâ in the south of Syria : on his return he suddenly died at Medinâ bequeathing to his widow, five camels, a flock of goats and a slave girl. This little property and the house where Ābdullâ dwelt were the inheritance which the prophet of Arabia received at his birth.

On the 20th of August, in the year 570 A. D. Āminâ gave birth to a child who was named Mohammed by his grand-father Ābdul Mutâlib. The meaning of the Arabic word Mohammed is 'The praised'. According to the Arabic custom, a child of better class was never nursed by its mother. So the infant Mohammed at his birth was made over to the nurse Theuba, the slave girl of his uncle. But after a few days another nurse Hâlima of the Beni-Sad tribe, took charge of the orphan child and nursed him until he was five years old. During this period Mohammed had several attacks of ecstatic trances which created alarm in the mind of the nurse, but otherwise he was healthy and robust ; and learned to speak the purest Arabic of Beni-Sad tribe. In after years.

Mohammed never forgot the kindness of Hâlima his nurse ; I am the most perfect Arab among you ; my descent is from the Korish and my tongue is the tongue of Beni-Sad”.

Mohammed spent the sixth year of his life with his mother at Mecca. Then he accompanied her to Medinâ to see some of her relatives. He stayed with his mother for a month in the house where his father died, saw his grave and then started for Meccâ, but on the way his mother fell sick and died and he returned with his nurse to Meccâ. This visit left an indelible impression upon the memory of Mohammed. The early loss of his mother made him feel lonely and sorrowful. His young mind began to meditate upon the transitoriness of earthly relation ; and as he matured this meditative nature became stronger.

His grand-father Ābdul-Mutâlib took the charge of him and treated him with unusual fondness until 578 A. D., when he died. The loss of his loving grand-father was a great shock to the young heart of Mohammed, who was then only eight years old. However, the dying grand-father consigned the guardianship of his orphan grand-child to his son Ābu-Talib, who faithfully discharged his duty as long as he lived. Ābu-Talib's foundness for Mohammed equalled that of his father and he treated his nephew as his own child. He kept Mohammed under his constant supervision and took him wherever he went. When Mohammed

reached his twelfth year Ābu-Tâlib started a mercantile expedition to Syria. But the young Mohammed would not be left behind, he must accompany his uncle and so they went together. On this journey they went through several Jewish settlements and came in contact with the Christians of Syria. This gave a great opportunity to Mohammed to learn the manners, customs ceremonies and religious beliefs of the Jews and the Christians. His keen intellect, governed by a high spiritual tendency, grasped even at this early age, the minute theological differences that exist between the faiths of the Jews and the Christians.

Nothing of importance is mentioned in the life of Mohammed until he was twenty years old. At this time he took part in a battle which was fought by his uncles against the rival chiefs of other tribes. Mohammed however did not fight, but gathered the arrows of the enemy, as they fell and handed them over to his uncles. On one occasion, in his youth, he took up the occupation of a shepherd and as he watched the flocks in a lonely desert he often felt the presence of the Divine power around him, and frequently went into ecstatic trances which were natural to him, and thus communed with the Supreme. The historians unanimously declare that in modesty of deportment, purity of manners and moral virtues, the youth Mohammed was unrivalled among all the inhabi-

tants of Mecca. It was on account of his pure character that his fellow citizens respected and honoured him and gave him the title of Al-Āmin, the faithful. Thus honoured, Mohammed lived a quiet life in the family of his uncle Ābu-Tâlib, until he was obliged to earn his own livelihood, for Ābu-Tâlib had a large family and but moderate means.

Mohammed was never covetous of wealth nor did he care for the bustle and anxiety of a merchant life. But forced by pecuniary circumstances and requested by Ābu-Tâlib himself, he accompanied the caravan of a wealthy Arab lady Khâdizâ, of the Korish tribe, and started for Syria.

The reflective mind of Mohammed, who was now 25 years old, found another opportunity to imbibe the tents and beliefs of the Syrian Christians. He observed the rites and ceremonies of the worship of Mary and Jesus on the Cross. After disposing of the merchandise and buying things which Khâdizâ, the wealthy widow needed, Mohammed returned with the caravan to Meccâ. Historians describe the characteristic features of Mohammed in the prime of youth in the following manner: Slightly above the middle size, his figure though spare, was handsome and the chest broad and open; the bones and frame-work large; and the joints well-knit together. His neck was long and finely moulded. His head, unusually large, gave space for a broad and noble brow. The hair

the news, went to the shore, purchased the timber of the broken ship, and engaged her captain, a skilful Greek architect, Becum by name, to help in the reconstruction of Kaabâ. The foundation and walls were built, but a serious discussion arose regarding the spot where the sacred black-stone should be placed in the wall. On account of the difference of opinion the building was suspended for four or five days. The contention among the Korish priests became hot and was about to end in blood-shed, when an old Arab citizen declared: "O Korish, hearken unto me, my advice is that the man who chanceth first to enter the court of the Kaabâ by the yonder gate, he shall be chosen either to decide the difference amongst us or himself place the stone". The priests and citizens agreed to this proposal with acclamation and waited for the result. It happened that Mohammed was the first man to enter the gate. Seeing him they all exclaimed, here comes Al-Āmin, the faithful; we are content to abide by his decision. Receiving the commission, calm and self-possessed, he tried to conciliate them all by taking off his mantle and spreading it on the ground, placing the stone thereon and asking the chiefs to raise the four corners of the mantle. As they lifted the stone from the ground by holding the corners of the garment, Mohammed directed them with his own hand to the spot, where it should be placed, and

there it has stood for the succeeding centuries. The reflective mind of Mohammed at once realized that Providence has singled him out to be judge among his people in such a sacred matter. He felt for the people of Meccâ, whose immorality and debasement became almost unbearable to him.

Mohammed's heart was longing for Divine revelation and he wanted to know the true religion of God. So he retired to the solitary valleys and caves of mount Hirâ, about three miles north of Meccâ. There he would live in a cave for days at a time, sometimes alone, sometimes with his wife Khâdizâ. This mountain range is stony and barren and has not one single green spot on it. The scenery was dry and dreary under the tropical sun, consequently, there was no external attraction for our hero, but his whole soul was now absorbed in spiritual visions which naturally appeared to him. Sometimes he would remain motionless in ecstasy, sometimes he would burst forth in wild rhapsodical language. Some-times he would repeat in beautiful Arabic poems with such sentiments : "Verily, the man is in the way of ruin excepting such as possesses faith". Sometimes he would pray for guidance to the supreme Being, who alone, as he believed, could help him. Sometimes standing alone on the mountain top amid the stillness of death which reigned in the desert, he would repeat : "Praise be to God, the Lord of

before him and approaching within two bow's length, brought from the most High the memorable Sura 96 which begins : "Recite in the name of thy Lord, who that created all things, who hath created man of congealed blood. Recite by thy most beneficial Lord, who taught the use of pen, and who teacheth man that which he knoweth not assuredly, Verily, man becometh insolent, because he seeth himself abound in riches. Verily unto thy Lord shall be the return of all. What thinkest thou as to him who forbideth our servant, when he prayeth ? What thinkest thou ; if he follow the right direction ; or command piety ? What thinkest thou ; if he accuses the Divine revelations of falsehood, and turn his back ? Doeth he not know that God seeth ? Assuredly. Verily, if he forbear not, we will drag him by the forelock, the lying, sinful forlock. And let him call his council to his assistance ; we also will call the infernal guards to cast him into Hell. Assuredly, obey him not ; but continue to adore God ; and draw high unto Him".

Thus receiving the Divine commission from the Lord, Mohammed spoke literally in the name of Lord. For this reason every sura in the Korân begins with 'Say' or 'Recite'. Now he became prophet and vicegerent of the Almighty.

But the people of Meccâ did not recognize the Divine commission. He was scorned, abused and called names. The people would treat him as one

insane, as a sorcerer as one possessed by evil spirits and so on. Mohammed grieved, and dispirited, wearied and perplexed, stretched himself on a carpet covering his body with his garment, and went into the trance of ecstasy. Again the angel appeared to him and commanded him to preach saying : "Oh thou that are covered, arise and speak and magnify thy Lord".

Thus we see that Mohammed was not only an inspired prophet but was commissioned by the Lord to preach and summon his people to his religion. These visions are described to be as real as the morning dawn. From this time on revelations began to follow one after another until the last moment of his earthly career.

Mohammed's faith in the Lord become unbounded. He would not take one single step in his actions until he had received a direct command from the Above. When the command came the countenance of the prophet used to be troubled and he would fall on the ground senseless or go into a trance. Often-times the inspiration would come unexpectedly without giving any previous warning to him. Mohammed himself said when asked : "Inspiration cometh in one of two ways ; sometimes Gabriel communicateth the revelation to me as one man to another ; this is easy, and other times, it is like the ringing of the bell penetrating my heart and rending me ; and this is which afflicteth me the most". It was on

account of these violent inspirations that the hair of the prophet prematurely turned grey. All these revelations are teamed the Korân or word of God, the literal meaning of the word being "what is read or recited".

At the age of 44 Mohammed became firmly convinced that he was the Prophet of God and all doubt vanished from his mind. Now Mohammed began to preach against Idol-worship and that "There is but one God and Mohammed his prophet". Disregarding the scorn and abuse of his relatives and of the people he went on preaching the truth and succeeded in adding to the small group of his admirers: viz. his two adopted sons and Abu-Bekar, his friend. There were 40 converts during the first four years; after three years of private preaching and solicitation the prophet made an open call to the Korish at large. But the Korish objected to this call because they were worshippers of the Idol of Kaabâ. They thought that their fore-father's religion, the worship of Kaabâ, the glory of Meccâ as the centre of pilgrimage from all Arabia was in great danger. So the Korish were determined to crush the new religion of the prophet and force the followers to abandon it. Now terrible persecution began, hostility was excited and acts of violence, commenced. One of the followers of Mohammed retired with a group of believers to a valley near Meccâ for prayer and meditation.

On the way they met strong opposition from the unbelievers, ending in fight, and then it was that the first blood was shed in Islam by the prophets follower Sad, who struck a man with a camel's goad.

As time went on, the followers of Mohammed began to increase in numbers and the jealousy and enmity of Korish were extremely aggravated by the success of the new sect. Mohammed himself being protected by his powerful uncle Abu-Tâlib remained safe and uninjured, but his followers were terribly persecuted. Mohammed then commanded his followers to go to Abyssinia^(Ethiopia); and in the 7th month of the 5th year of Mohammed's mission, eleven of his followers with their wives sailed in flights to Abyssinia^(Ethiopia). This is termed the first Hégirâ. The Korish pursued them in vain.

One of his followers then spoke to the Christian King of Abyssinia regarding what Mohammed had done for them. "O King", said he, "we were an ignorant people, we worshipped images, ate dead bodies, were lewd, ill-treated our neighbours, and the strong despoiled the weak of their properties. We were long been in this condition, when God sent a prophet to us from amongst our own people, whose noble birth, truthfulness, honesty and righteousness were well known to us. He called us to God, to worship Him and Him only, and to leave off adoring the idols and stones

before which our fathers and forefathers knelt. He ordered us to obey God alone and not to make anyone His equal. He made it incumbent on us to offer up prayers, to give alms, to fast when not sick or travelling. He commanded us to speak the truth, to give back safe and whole what is entrusted to us by others, to be affectionate to our relations and kind to our neighbours, to shun wicked acts, licentiousness and bloody quarrels. He told us not to bear false evidence, not to deprive orphans of their properties, not to impute bad motives or be suspicious of women. We have taken his advice and admonitions to heart, have believed in his truthfulness, have followed all the orders which God has made known to us, and have believed in the unity of God. We abstain from what is forbidden, and confine ourselves to what is permitted.

Our people are infuriated at this change in our belief, thoughts and actions. They have persecuted us, and done their best to force us back to the idols, images and wicked acts which we have left. When it became impossible to live among them, and when persecution and torture became unbearable, we left our country, and believing to be a tolerant king have taken refuge in your dominion.

In the meantime, the revelations continued, and Gabriel appeared to Mohammed, giving him all instructions regarding the doctrine of Islam

such as the pictures of heaven and hell ; of the paradise, the celestial enjoyments for the believers, and eternal hell fire for the unbelievers the resurrection of the body, etc.

Now the dispensation of Mohammed was called Islam (surrender of the soul of God) and his followers were named Mussalmans, that is, those who surrender themselves, and unbelievers were termed Kâfir. At the age of 50 Mohammed lost his beloved wife Khâdizâ. So long the prophet was devoted to one wife although polygamy was the prevailing custom of the Arabs and a month after this Abu-Tâlib the uncle and guardian of the prophet passed away. He was the prop of his childhood, the guardian of his youth and a tower of defence in his maturity. Now, Mohammed was heart-broken. He had lost his best friend and the guardian. From this time on the persecution of the Korish was directed towards the prophet himself.

At the age of 52 Mohammed, in a vision, being guided by Gabriel, his soul snared to the seventh heaven and appeared in the direct presence of the Almighty, who instructed him to pray five times in the day, instead of three. The Korish now plotted against the life of Mohammed ; and so he fled to Medinâ in June 622 A. D. arriving there on the 8th day (June 28th) at the age of 53. All of his disciples and followers, numbering about 100 deserted their homes in Meccâ and

went to Medinâ with the prophet. This is the 2nd Hegirâ

In Medinâ, he bought a place and within 7 months after his arrival built his first mosque or place for worship. It was called the mosque of Friday (Musjid-al-Juma). Friday became the Sabbath for public worship, because Mohammed held his first service at Medinâ on Friday. Mohammed spent the rest of his life in Medinâ and many revelations came at this time.

In 630 A. D., the prophet entered into Meccâ commanding 10,000 followers armed in battle array; took possession of the Kaabâ, destroyed the idols and triumphantly established the banner of Islam in the heart of Meccâ. After the conquest of Meccâ, Mohammed said: "O Lord, I have delivered my message and discharged my ministry". Then he returned to Medinâ where he passed out at the age of 63 in the year 632 A.D., after suffering for two weeks from a severe attack of fever.

No prophet had ever suffered so much persecution nor had shown so much firmness of faith and trust in the will of his Lord throughout his life and under all circumstances as was shown by the prophet of Arabia. His teachings were simple but full of fire which suited the warlike temper of the Arab nation.

Mohammed by his teachings changed the character of the lawless Arab tribes, gave them

laws, made them law-abiding, and from disintegrated and warring factions, created a nation. No prophet could have done anything with these wild fanatical people of the desert of Arabia.

Mohammed preached the unity of God and unity of his prophet, whosoever believes this doctrine receives everlasting life and celestial happiness. Regarding the glorious work of Mohammed, Carlyle writes : "To the Arab nation it was as a birth from darkness into light ; Arabia first became alive by means of it. A poor shepherd people, roaming unnoticed in its deserts since the creation of the world ; A Hero-Prophet was sent down to them with a world they could believe ; see, the unnoticed becomes world-notable, the small has grown world-great ; within one century afterwards, Arabia is at Grenada on this hand, at Delhi on that ; glancing in valour and splendour and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world. Belief is great, life giving. The history of a nation becomes fruitful, soul-elevating, great, as soon as it believes. These Arabs, the man Mohammed and that one century,—is it not as if a spark had fallen, one spark, on a world of what seemed black, un-noticeable sand, but lo the sand proves explosive powder, blazes heaven-high from Delhi to Grenada".

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS
TEACHINGS

Many centuries before the Christian era, Bhagavân Sri Krishna said :

"Whenever religion declines and irreligion prevails, I manifest myself in a human form to establish righteousness and to destroy evil".

This divine promise has been fulfilled not only in India, but also in other parts of the world. If we study carefully the religious history of the world, we find that after Sri Krishna, there arose many shining stars in spiritual life, who have been regarded as spiritual giants, prophets, teachers, and saviours. Among those great ones we may mention a few who came one after another in course of time. We are all familiar with the name of Gautamae Buddha, the great founder of Buddhism which converted many of the civilized nations of the pre-Christian era, and whose followers now exceed those of other religions. About 2,600 years ago, Gautama Buddha lived and taught the highest ideals of humanity. He was the son of a Hindu Râjâ. He left his throne, his beautiful wife and child as well as all the comforts and luxuries of a princely life, went out of his palace with a begging bowl in his hand,



and suffered all kinds of hardships and austerities, performing penances for many long years, until he attained to Buddhahood. Buddha wanted to find a remedy for the sorrows, miseries, diseases and death from which human beings were suffering, and having discovered that remedy he gave it out freely among the masses, so that every one might get a glimpse of that joy and happiness which comes through Nirvâna, the beatific state of supreme consciousness.

About the time when Buddha was delivering his message in India, there arose in Persia the great founder of Zoroastrianism, Zarathustra, the prophet of the Parsee religion. He was the chosen prophet of Ahura Mazda, the great God whom the Parsees worshipped with love and reverence. About the same time there appeared in China, Lao-Tze, the great philosopher and the founder of Taoism. Taoism is a great religion which has influenced the spiritual life of the Chinese people, and Lao-Tze is regarded by the followers of Taoism as the saviours of the Chinese.

Nearly six hundred years after Buddha, there arose in Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, who delivered his message among the Jewish people. His religion has since converted thousand and thousands of the followers of other religions in Europe and in western parts of Asia. Jesus of Nazareth is regarded in Chrsitendom as the Saviour of mankind. About six hundred years

ter Jesus the Christ, there came Mohammed, the prophet of Arabia. He was the founder of Islam. Mohammed is regarded, by his followers, not as an incarnation of Divinity like Christ, but as a prophet, or messenger, the last of all the prophets, who came to deliver the divine message. Then again, a little later we find in India, there appeared Sankarâchârya, the great philosopher and founder of Advaita philosophy, the non-dualistic or monistic system of Vedânta. After Sankarâchârya, about 600 years later, there came other great teachers in succession like Râmaânûja in Southern India, Chaitanya in Bengal, and Guru Nânak in the Punjab. Other prophets also arose in other parts. After Chaitanya and Guru Nânak, there was a need for a spiritual master, because the religious ideals which were very strong in the days of Chaitanya and Guru Nânak, deteriorated in many ways, on account of the inroads of the Western civilization and materialistic and commercial ideals which were pouring into the heart of India from Europe, especially from England.

The students of the universities and colleges in India were receiving instructions on material lines, and their ideals became more and more soulless and worldly. They forgot the spiritual ideals of their motherland. They received Godless education in the universities; and constant attacks of the Christian Missionaries against

Hindu ideals created a kind of unrest in the whole country. People were flocking into the churches, forsaking their own religion and receiving instructions in Christian ideals of thought. At that time there was a great need for a spiritual harmony among all religions. The different sects among the Hindus made votaries who became blind in their faith and attacked the followers of other religions and of other sects, condemned and criticized them. The Vaishnavas were condemning the Sâktas and the Saivas, who in turn found fault with the Vaishnavas; the Vaishnavas were denouncing the Buddhists; the Hindus were reproving the Christians, while the Christians were reprobating the Hindus. Following the footsteps of the Christian Missionaries, the Brâhmo Samâj was attacking the orthodox Hinduism. At that time there was a terrible unrest everywhere. At this juncture, according to the promise of the Lord that "whenever religion declines and irreligion prevails, I manifest myself in a human form to establish righteousness and to destroy evil", and in order to fulfil that promise, as it were there arose in an obscure village of Bengal, a great spiritual giant who was afterwards known as Bhagayân Sri Râmakrishna Paramahansa.

On Wednesday the 17th of February 1836 A. D. Bhagayân Sri Râmakrishna was born at Kâmârpukur in the district of Hooghly, Bengal. His parents were of humble means, but extremely

righteous, and they belonged to the most noble and respectable family of the high caste Brâhmins. His father Khudirâm Chattopâdhyâya was very orthodox, and prayerful, and lived up to the high ideals of a spiritual life. He never spoke an untruth. Khudirâm was honoured and revered as a *Vâksiddha Purusha* i.e. whatever he uttered invariably came true. He never accepted any offering from unrighteous hands or from the low Sudras.

Srî Râmakrishna's mother was equally pious and full of devotion. She was like the embodiment of simplicity and kindness. Her mind was free from earthly desires, pride and egotism. Born of such pious parents in an obscure quarters of the world, Gadâdhar (which was the former name of Srî Râmakrishna) spent his boyhood in the place of his birth. Many narratives of his early life have been handed down to us which prove that Gadâdhar possessed supernatural powers even from his childhood. He had keen intellect and wonderful memory.

When Gadâdhar was five years old, his parents sent him to the old fashioned village primary school. There he learnt how to read and write but he showed great aversion to Arithmetic when he was told to subtract one number from another. He learnt addition (*yôga*) very cheerfully, but he disliked subtraction (*viyôga*). Moreover, he did not care so much for studying books. He would

rather make a resort in a solitary mango-grove, situated in the outskirts of the village, where he would lead his playmates and would spend the whole day in playing the pastoral sports of Srî Krishna with merry songs and boyish mirth. Gadâdhar had a sweet musical voice, and he could imitate to perfection any melody after hearing it for the first time. Sometimes he would gather the peasant boys and girls around him, play and dance with them as Srî Krishna did in Brindâvan, and lead them as their guiding spirit. All of his boyish plays had a striking resemblance to the Paurânic descriptions of the pastoral sports of the *brindâvan-lîlâ* of the great Incarnation, Srî Krishna.

Gadâdhar had a charm in his speech and could chant a whole drama word for word after hearing it once. He could imitate the gestures and mannerisms of any actor in the local dramatic party or *yâtrâ*. Gadâdhar was naturally endowed with talents for fine arts. Sometimes he would go alone in the woods and stay in a solitary place for hours under the shade of a big tree and made clay images of gods, goddesses and holy saints of Hindu mythology, and give them away to friends. At other times he would spend hours in drawing sketches of flowers, birds and animals and paint portraits with colours.

All these marvellous powers made Gadâdhar the centre of attraction for the young and old inhabitants of surrounding villages. Thus gradually

he became so popular that he would be invited to almost every house of high and low castes, and in spite of the unkind admonitions of his relatives he would readily accept invitations of all and visit them without thinking anything about their caste, creed and social position. There was something very fascinating in his personality. His fair complexion, smiling face, melodious voice, and perfectly symmetrical figure' with a soul adorned with disinterested love for all, hypnotized and bewildered, as it were, the minds of those who ever happened to come in touch with him even for a moment. When he was about six years old Gadâdhar went one day into the ecstatic state of superconscious communion with the Divine existence-consciousness-bliss (*sat-chit-ânanda*), the infinite source of pure existence, intelligence and bliss, at the sight of the most beautiful colouring of some passing clouds, against which were flying in a row some snow-white wild cranes. This beautiful scene reminded him the unearthly complexion of Sṛī Krishna's figure (body), adorned with the exquisite garland of wild flowers of the garden in Heaven. This experience was the first instance of Divine ecstasy or Godconsciousness (*samâdhi*), which later in his life became constant companion of Bhagâvan Sṛī Râmakrishna. He always remembered this ecstatic vision and spoke of it to his disciples. This superconscious realization of the Divine communion

of the soul with God which the Yogis struggle hard for ages to attain to, was like a gift of nature with Srî Râmakrishna. Sometimes Gadâdhar would sit with the learned Pandits and scholars, philosophers and theologians, and listen to their debate with intense interest and make cogent remarks in an off-hand way, which were always sure to be conclusive and extremely effective to the minds of all hearers. Those appropriate remarks showed invariably how deep was the insight and how vast was the wisdom and intuition of this wonderful boy. In this way, Gadâdhar spent his boyhood by winning the hearts of all.

When he was seven years old, his aged father passed away. This event made him pensive and impressed upon his mind the transitoriness of all earthly objects. He now began to frequent the cremation grounds near the mango-grove and sit there for hours absorbed in meditation. When the itinerant *Sâdhus* would come to the village on their way to Jagannâth, he would freely mix with them and dress like the *Sannyâsins* who had renounced the world. Even at this tender age Gadâdhar's mind was longing to become free from the fetters of *mâyâ* or worldly attachment, and he frequently went into trance-like conditions of ecstasy when his body would become stiff and motionless. But his relatives thought that the young boy was under the influence of some evil spirits. Although Gadâdhar

was born and reared in a strictly orthodox family, his mind was free from all prejudices and he had no hatred against any of low castes. On the contrary, he thought that all men and women were the children of the almighty Lord and, consequently, were like his own brothers and sisters. Therefore, at the age of nine when he was invested with the sacred thread he did not hesitate to receive food offering (*bhikṣā*) from a blacksmith's wife of a low *sudra* caste, whom he regarded as his godmother. This created a great sensation among the people of his village, especially among his relatives who were furious at the thought that Gadâdhar being the son of a holy Brâhmin who was highly respected by all, should accept the offering of low *sudra* woman and should regard her as his godmother ! But Gadâdhar did not mind their uncharitable remarks, and felt genuine delight for what he had done. Thus from his early boyhood Gadâdhar showed that his mission was to establish harmony and unity among all classes of Hindu people, and he never failed to express in words and deeds the Divine love which was overflowing in his heart for the good of all.

When he was ten years old Gadâdhar was persuaded to impersonate the Siva in a dramatic performances of the *sivarâtri* night in the neighbourhood. Dressed up as a great Yogî, when Gadâdhar appeared before the audience, he stood

motionless with tears in his eyes, as if he was possessed by the spirit of the great god Mahâdeva. He lost all senseconsciousness and entered into a deep state of ecstatic superconsciousness. The audience fell at his feet, bowed with reverence and saw in him the veritable image of Siva. From this time onward, his ecstatic visions became more and more frequent. Whenever he would think of Srî Krishna his whole being would be filled with the divine spirit of the Lord of Brindâvan. Sometimes he would sing religious songs and at other times he would think of himself as female, and feel within himself the presence of Râdhâ, the divine consort of Srî Krishna. Thus he spent his boyhood in Kâmârpukur, until he was seventeen years old, and completely conquered the minds of all the inhabitants of all castes and creeds of adjacent villages. There was not a soul in the neighbourhood, who did not realize the wonderful powers of this enchanter of human hearts, and who did not love him as his dearest friend and nearest relative.

About this time Gadâdhar's eldest brother Râmkumâr opened a *Tol* (Sanskrit pâthshâlâ), to teach Logic, Theology, Sanskrit literature, Astronomy, Hindu law and philosophies. Râmkumâr thought that Gadâdhar was losing his valuable time and opportunity for receiving proper education in those branches of knowledge. He felt that it was a disgrace and shame to the

family of a highcaste Brâhmin, to have a member ignorant and uneducated in those important branches of learning, and that in future he would be unable to earn his livelihood, and would become a burden to the poor family. So, after much consideration Râmkumâr brought his younger brother Gadâdhar to Calcutta, kept him under his care and persuaded him to study in his school. Gadâdhar joined the school and began to study, but strange to say that his youthful mind was neither attracted by secular studies, nor was influenced in the least by the good counsels of his eldest brother. He began to think of the results which could be achieved by secular education and compared them with the highest ideal of his life. He said to himself that secular education was good for earning one's livelihood as well as for acquiring name, fame and earthly prosperity. But the acquisition of all these he did not care for. He wanted to have that kind of knowledge which would enable him to realize the unchangeable Truth of the universe, and which would lead his soul to the attainment of spiritual perfection, and freedom from all the fetters of the world. This thought grew so strong in his soul, which was aspiring for Divine knowledge or *parâvidyâ*, that it forced him to become indifferent to book-learning and theoretical training of the school. His soul yearned for some kind of education which

would give him as a recompense neither wealth, nor name, or fame but the realization of the supreme Lord of the universe.

Seeing this sudden change in Gadâdhar's mental attitude, Râmkumâr became extremely discouraged and disappointed. He then tried to get some kind of occupation which might be agreeable to the spiritual tendency and truth seeking mind of Gadâdhar, and at last found for him the position of a family priest in some respectable families in the neighbourhood of his Tol (*Sanskrit Pâthshâlâ*) at Jhâmapukur in Calcutta. Gadâdhar faithfully discharged his duties for nearly two years.

In the meantime, Râmkumâr accepted the position of a high priest in the temple of Kâli, the Divine Mother at Dakshineswar about four miles north of Calcutta on the banks of the Ganges. This beautiful temple was built by Râni Râshmoni, a pious Hindu lady of the caste of fisherman, in a beautiful garden measuring about twenty acres of land at an enormous cost of nine lacs of rupees. Within the compound there are a Vishnu temple, a temple dedicated to the Goddess Kâli, and twelve Siva temples. It took nearly eight years to complete the construction of this magnificent structure. The Hindu temples are built not for public devotion like Christian churches or Mohammedan mosques. On the contrary, they are erected mostly by wealthy

persons as a meritorious religious act. These temples are dedicated to the honour of some god or goddess of Hindu mythology or of an Incarnation of God with an image or statue or certain symbol of the Deity upon the altar. Alms-houses are generally attached to these temples, where hundreds of poor persons are daily fed with all kinds of cooked food. The duty of a priest is to show reverence to the Being whose image or symbol is kept upon the temple-altar and to offer everything to his memory, just as a Hindu householder would offer the best things he possessed to the most respectable guest when he comes to his house. But the priest must feel the actual presence of the deity before he can be satisfied that his offerings are accepted and his prayers are heard.

Râmkumâr was appointed to perform all such duties of a high priest as well as to conduct the inaugural ceremony of the temple which took place on May 21st, 1855 A. D. This opened the way for Gadâdhar to accompany his eldest brother to assist him in the discharge of the duties of the high priest.

The magnetic personality of young Gadâdhar attracted the attention of Râni Râshmoni and her son-in-law Mathur Bâbu, who noticed in him the expression of uncommon spiritual powers. They felt that if Gadâdhar would take up the worship of the Divine Mother in the temple of Kâli, Her

Divine grace would soon be perceived by all and that his whole-hearted devotion would make the image of Kâli the living goddess in the temple. With this kind of faith in his mind, Mathur Bâbu approached Gadâdhar, and urged him to take up the worship or *pujâ* duty of the Divine Mother.

At first Srî Râmakrishna, who was a lover of freedom, disliked the idea of being tied down to the routine work of a priest ; but when he received the help of his nephew Hridayrâm, he became the priest in the temple of Râdhâ Govinda, and Râmkumâr continued his duties of the Kâli temple. This arrangement lasted for about one year when Râmkumâr suddenly passed away. Srî Râmakrishna was then obliged to do the works of Râmkumâr although his heart was heavily laden with grief and sadness. He began to feel more keenly the transitoriness of earthly life, and the realization of the Mother of the universe as the highest ideal of human existence.

Râmakrishna performed the daily duties of a priest in the Kâli temple, repeated prayers to the Divine Mother, offered flowers scent and cooked food of various kinds, burnt incense and waved light every morning and evening for a few months. But the earnest and truth-seeking soul of Srî Râmakrishna longed for something more and began to question within himself : "What is all this for ? Am I doing all these things before a dead statue of stone or does the actual Divine

Mother listen to my prayers and accept my offerings?" This questioning of the mind was the turning-point in the life of this sincere young priest. It aroused the dormant spirit and forced him to take a new path, the followers of which are very rare and the goal of which is the transformation of the individual soul into a living God.

He would constantly pray to the Divine Mother, and entreat Her to manifest, and appear before him. Sometimes he would burst forth into tears and ask; "Oh Mother! Art Thou here? Dost Thou listen to what I say? How can I know where Thy abode is? Thou dwellest everywhere, yet why can I not see Thee? How can I realize Thy presence and behold Thy Divine form? If Thou art the Mother of all, am I not Thy child too? Why dost Thou not come to me and show me Thy real form? I am illiterate, I do not know how to read the scriptures (*shâstras*), teach me, Oh Mother! Thy Divine wisdom". In this manner, he would cry and pray. As the days went by, the fire of the search after Divine Mother began to burn within his soul with so much vigour that it could not be quenched by any other thing of this world. It swallowed up all other desires, all other thoughts and ideas. The rising and setting of the sun made no change in his soul. Day after day and night after night he had one current of thought. Neither the counsels of friends nor the advice of relatives

could resist the tremendous onrush of that ever-flowing current. He did not care for food, cloths or any comfort of life. He lost his sleep and could no longer discharge the duties of a temple priest. He was obliged to resign.

The officers of the temple decided that Srî Râmakrishna had turned insane. They pitied him, sympathized with him, and prayed for him, but all was in vain. His relatives thought that perhaps he could be cured if they could make him marry. But it was extremely difficult to find a bride of proper age, whose parents would be willing to give their daughter in marriage to a Brâhmin who had lost his prestige and social position by becoming a temple priest. Above all, how could respectable parents agree to marry their daughter to one who was known everywhere as insane? At last, after searching for a long time, they found a very young girl, whose parents did not object so much. But this girl, who was only five years old, was betrothed to Srî Râmakrishna, who was then twenty three years old. However, the betrothal ceremony made no impression upon his mind. He went on in his own line of thought as before, sometimes praying and crying, sometimes sitting alone in deep meditation under the big banyan tree in the Panchavati and sometimes sitting in the lonely spot under the *bael* tree at night.

There have been several World Teachers in the past, among whom Gautama Buddha, nearly twenty

five centuries ago, performed the severest austerities, the most vivid descriptions of which have been handed down to us through ages. His path was suited to the time, when he flourished, and his discoveries of the grand truth in the spiritual realm have helped mankind in their struggle for the attainment of peace, happiness and emancipation from all bondages. As Buddha came to fulfil the spiritual needs of those people, among whom he lived and moved, so did Christ and Chaitanya give to the world according to the spiritual demands of the time and place of their birth.

Similarly, Bhagavân Srî Râmakrishna came to give to the world something, which is greatly needed in the twentieth century. The great renunciation of Gautama Buddha was certainly unparalleled, but there is another phase of renunciation which was never performed by any *Avatâra* or Great Teacher of the world. It is perhaps more difficult to accomplish than the external abandonment of wealth, wife and children. Even after practising for six long years all kinds of penance and asceticism, Buddha found that the thought of his wife and child still lingered in his mind. Sri Râmakrishna, however, conquered all attachment to wealth and woman not by running away from them, but by living in their midst and yet rising above them.

Sri Râmakrishna conquered all attachment to

wealth by practising a unique *sâmdhanâ*. He would take some dust of earth in one hand and gold or silver coin in the other and repeat : 'tâkâ mâti ; mâti tâkâ',—'gold is dust, dust is gold', and after realizing the sameness of both, he would throw them away into the ganges. Since then, nothing of the world appeared valuable to him. It was an example of the conquest of matter by the power of the mind. From this time he could not bear the touch of any coin or metal of any kind. His fingers would grow stiff and body motionless if he unconsciously touched any metal ; even when he was asleep, if his body was touched with gold or silver coin, the result would be similar. Thus he renounced wealth because an attachment to it is an obstacle in the path of Godconsciousness. In this age of materialism, people's mind is so strongly attached to wealth that they have become money-making machines, and the general belief is that the acquisition of wealth is the highest ideal of earthly life. Most of the people nowadays do not hesitate to commit any wrong for the sake of gaining wealth. Therefore, through this unique *sâdhanâ* Sri Ramakrishna has become the perfect ideal of non-attachment to wealth.

Sri Râmkrishna conquered all lust and attachment to woman by realizing that every woman, young or old, is the earthly representative of the Divine Mother. He worshipped all women, by seeing the Divine Mother in them. He did not

run away from his wife, but worshipped and realized her as the embodiment of the Divine Mother. Even when he was taken by Mathur Bâbu to the house of a public woman, Sri Râmakrishna said : "My Divine Mother appears before me in the form of an unchaste woman", and then and there he merged in *samâdhi*, the divine trance. The woman after hearing this, prostrated at the holy feet of the Bhagavân. This kind of attitude towards women, is the sure and effective means of conquering attachment to lust and woman.

In the lives of previous Hindu *Avatdras* as well as of great Siva, we find that they all had wives and children. Gourânga married twice but had no issue. There are examples of World Teachers like Sankarâcharya, Christ, and others, who lived a pure life and remained unmarried. None of them had set such a high example of absolute freedom from sex-idea, as was done by Sri Râmakrishna, even while he was living in company with his wife. who was the blessed virgin all through her life.

In this age of lust and greed, when men and women have no control over sex-idea. when the ideal of strict *brahmacharya* is almost forgotten, Bhagavân Sri Râmakrishna and his wife Sâradâ Devi showed in their lives how spiritual marriage is possible purely on the soul-plane. Furthermore, Sri Râmakrishna exhibited deep reverence towards all women by accepting a woman as his *Guru*, who was a *Brahmachârini* of rare culture and qualifica

tions and well-versed in Hindu scriptures. It was she who helped Sri Râmakrishna in various kinds of *sâdhanâ*. It was she who convinced all people that Sri Râmakrishna was neither mad nor insane, but that he had attained the highest state of communion with the Divine Mother of the universe. She noticed in him the signs of *mahâbhâva*—highest ecstasy, which Râdhâ of Brindavan and Gourânga of Nadia attained in their struggle for Divine communion.

This *Brahmachârini* stayed at Dakshineswar for several years, and taught Sri Râmakrishna different practices in various branches of Yoga. Through each *sâdhanâ* Sri Râmakrishna attained its goal within a very short period of time.

Before this *Brahmachârini* came to Dakshineswar, Sri Râmakrishna passed through various stages of *sâdhanâ*. In the first stage, he longed for a vision of the Divine Mother. Sometimes he would sit near *Panchavati* on the banks of the Ganges, cry bitterly for the vision of the Divine Mother, pray to Her like a child, lie down roll himself and rub his face on the bare ground, as if he was suffering from the agony of death, until the longing of his soul became almost unbearable. One day Sri Ramakrishna went to the temple and like a mad man implored the Divine Mother again and again, to appear before him in Her real form, and said : 'Oh Mother, if Thou art not gracious enough to show me Thy real form, I shall kill myself on

this spot at this very moment'. Thus saying he quickly drew the heavy sword which was hanging on the wall within the temple. As he raised it up to his neck and was about to cut his head off, the sword dropped from his hand on the floor and at the same moment he fell unconscious with tears of joy streaming down his cheeks. The real form of the Divine Mother now appeared before him and after blessing him entered into the stone image of Kâlî in the temple. From this time Sri Râmakrishna used to see the vision of the Divine Mother and remain in ecstasy for hours together during day and night and acted like a mad man. But no one could understand him.

In another stage of his *sâdhanâ*, Sri Râmakrishna thought that the idea of caste superiority in a Brâhmin was a great hindrance to God-vision. Therefore, he would go to the house of a sweeper, who was an out-caste, and would stoop down to clean the door with his hands as well as with the hair of his head which was long and flowing. Thus he conquered all egotism and self-conceit.

In another stage, the thought came to him that as there were so many creeds and sects of different religions each one of which prescribed certain methods for attaining to God-consciousness, he would practise them all and would see for himself what results could be gained by following those methods. Thus thinking he took up one after another the various exercises given in *Tantra-*

shâstra ; and Vaishnava *shâstra* under the guidance of the Brâhmin lady *Brahmachârini*. Every time there came some expert *Sâdhka* to give him proper instruction for reaching the goal. Each of those experts, however, was astonished to see him mastering within a few days the most difficult exercises which took them years to accomplish.

Sri Râmakrishna followed then the path of Advaita Vedânta under the direction of Tota Puri, the great Jnana-Yogî who came to Dakshineswar. Within three days he attained to *nirvikalpa-Samâdhi*, where all sense consciousness vanished, all distinctions of duality disappeared; and his soul, transcending the sense of I, me and mine, merged into the infinite ocean of *sat-chit-ânanda* and enjoyed the bliss of *nirvâna*. Noticing this sudden transformation of Sri Ramakrishna, Totapuri declared : "What magic power (*daivi mâyâ*) is playing through thee that thou hast accomplished in three days what took me forty years to achieve ! How marvellous is all this !"

Sri Ramakrishna then took up the practices of the Mohammedan faith and did all that a devout Mohammedan would do for the realization of Āllah the God of Islam. Under the guidance and direction of a Mussulman Fakir, Govinda by name, Sri Ramakrishna would repeat the name of Āllah, recite namaz regularly, and would dress himself after the fashion of a Mohammedan. Within three days he realized Āllah and in a vision saw the prophet of

Islam. Sri Ramakrishna went beyond the boundary of orthodox Hinduism following the Christian and of Islamic methods of worship.

By practising all these various kinds of Sadhona Sri Ramakrishna realized the ideals of all sectarian religions, he discovered that the goal of each of them was the one Infinite Being called by various names ; that all sectarian religions were, like so many paths which lead to the same God. Thus he verified the saying of Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita ; *"Whosoever comes to Me through whatsoever path, I reach him, All men are struggling in different paths which ultimately lead to Me"*. The various religions of the world are like rivers which rising from different sources run crooked or straight and fall into one ocean. Even so the sectarian religions among various nations rising from different stand-points run crooked or straight into one infinite ocean of *sat-chit-ânanda*.

This grand Truth of the *sanâtana* Hindu religion was realized by Sri Ramakrishna in this age through *sâdhanâ*. Having finished his *sâdhanâ*, he proclaimed his message and gave to the world the fruits of his own experience and realization. Pandits and scholars of every nationality as well as hundreds of devout men and women of all sects came to see him and listened to his original and wonderful teachings. Using the commonest occurrences of every day life as illustrations, Sri Ramakrishna succeeded in making the dull minds of

worldly people grasp the spiritual depth, beauty and grandeur of his sublime ideals.

Have we not watched with admiration, when the followers of all the great religions of the world, recognized in Sri Ramakrishna their Divine ideals? Have we not seen how Quakers and orthodox Christians knelt and prayed before him and worshipped him as the Christ, when Bhagavan went into superconscious communion with the Heavenly Father after hearing the holy name of Jesus of Nazareth. The Mohammedan saints who came to see him prostrated at his holy feet and recognized in him the highest ideals of Islam. The Buddhist regarded him as *sambuddha*, the Enlightened. The followers of Chaitanya, like Vaishnavacharan and others worshipped him as the second prophet of Nadia when Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna occupied the altar which was reverentially dedicated to Sri Chaitanya by hundreds of devoted Vaishnavas, who always prostrated before that altar and prayed to their Lord Gauranga,

The worshippers of Sri Krishna saw in him the manifestation of the divine qualities of the Lord of Brindavan. The devotees of the Divine Mother of the universe saw that she was playing through him; the followers of *Siva* declared that Sri Ramakrishna was their living Deity; while the Sikhs, the faithful votaries of Guru Nanaka, regarded him as their holy Master.

His followers, seeing all these powers, marvelled

at his greatness and believed that his many-sided personality was the living example and the consummation of all the previous *Avatâras* and divine manifestations. And the Truth of this was again and again verified and confirmed by his acts as well as by his own words : "*He who was Râma, Krishna, Christ, Buddha, Chaitanya, has now become Râma-krishna*". Bhagavan was always conscious of this truth and spoke of it before the world as well as before his dearest disciples. As his divine personality was many sided, yet one, so was his great mission. It was to show the underlying unity in the variety of religions and to establish that universal religion of which sectarian religions are each but partial expressions. Like all other Saviours, the life of the Bhagavan exemplifies his mission.

In this age of scientific rationalism, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna has shown to the world how the Lord of the universe can be realized and attained in this life, and no one except him has ventured to go through all the tests of sceptics and agnostics to prove that he had attained to Godconsciousness. Those who have seen him, lived for years with him, and watched him day and night, have proclaimed before the world that he was the embodiment of the highest spiritual ideals, given in all the scriptures of the different nations of the world.

